

Pen

by the author of

"Miss Toosey's Mission" and "Laddie"



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ROBERTS BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
Boston.



PEN.



E N.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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"TIP-CAT," AND "OUR LITTLE ANN."

WATKINS, Evelyn



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MOTHERLESS	7
II. AUNT PENELOPE	22
III. A FIRESIDE TALK	33
IV. FLOWERS FOR HER	46
V. LOUIS BRAND'S CHILDREN	55
VI. HIGHFIELD	65
VII. MOTHER'S GRAVE	80
VIII. A DAY OF REST	90
IX. THE FAMILY CONSTELLATION	102
X. ONLY FOR A FORTNIGHT	112
XI. COMING BACK	121
XII. WHAT'S TO BE DONE?	140
XIII. A WOOING	158
XIV. THE WEDDING-DRESS	174
XV. THE BRIDEGROOM	189
XVI. THERE'S MANY A SLIP	198

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVII. YOUNG TOM	209
XVIII. SANDY'S RETURN	222
XIX. GOING COURTING	232
XX. AMONG THE LILIES	244
XXI. LITTLE MISS TRE	253
XXII. DRIFTING	268
XXIII. A THREATENING OF GOUT	282

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P E N.



CHAPTER I.

MOTHERLESS.

I CAN begin my story as country folk in old times used to begin their laborious letters: "I now take up my pen;" the pen in this case, not being a finely crusted, old nib, stuck in a much-nibbled holder, and held in inky country fingers, but a very tear-stained, sobbing, little Pen, in a large and rather ragged armchair, situated in a shabby, little front parlor in Dalston. Penelope Brand is just motherless, only just, for half an hour, out in the cold world, without a mother's wing, and she and little Tre are clinging together, with arms round necks, and wet cheek pressed to wet cheek.

Tre will soon get over it; she is only six, and has that blessed, but rather startling power of rapid recovery that is granted to children; even now, I think, her tears are more in sympathy

with Pen than expressive of her own sorrow, and she is even conscious that it is tea-time and that the kitten is playing with the reels in mother's work-basket ; while as for Pen, who is fifteen, the grim presence of death in the house seems to have swept away all times and seasons and objects for doing anything, and power to move or speak or do anything but sit there with Tre, cuddled close to her sad, sore, little heart, and cry and cry and cry and wish for mother, and listen to strange footsteps in the room above, where a gloomy old woman in a black bonnet had appeared mysteriously on the scene, and had insisted on Tre leaving that place by the bedside which had been hers by right for so long. If it had been still mother lying there, no power on earth could have moved Pen ; but that still, silent, solemn form was not mother ; hardly so much mother to Pen's mind as the worn, shabby, old dress hanging against the door, or the shawl that lay still on the sofa ; so she was persuaded to go away, and found her way, dazzled and shaking, downstairs, where the daylight seemed to have an unnatural glare, and all the old familiar things to look strange and impossible.

Father was locked into the little room at the back of the house which he called his studio, and

where his painting things lay about, not often disturbed from their picturesque confusion by the exertions of their master. There is no knowing how long Pen would have sat there, sunk in a sort of stupor of grief, if the sound of horses' feet had not penetrated even to her poor, dulled, little brain and brought her suddenly back to the consciousness of a very rough head and crumpled collar on her own part and a ragged pinafore and smeared face in the part of Tre ; and she got up mechanically and made a weary, ineffectual, little effort to improve matters, and to poke up the ashy fire and straighten the disordered furniture, which bore unmistakable signs of having been turned into a very satisfactory railway while the attention of elders was absorbed upstairs and Tre had it all her own way below.

There seemed no immediate reason why the even trotting of a pair of horses and the soft roll of carriage wheels should have roused Pen to the consciousness of the general untidiness ; many other vehicles had passed since she first came down from mother's room, and she had taken no note of them ; the heavy prison van that the children called " Black Maria " had lumbered by and none of them had even cast a look or wondered what burden of sin or sorrow it was carrying off

to justice ; one of the red Parcels Post carts had pulled up at the house opposite, and there had been a long discussion over a wrongly directed parcel, which at another time would have roused great interest, and convictions that the parcel was really intended for No. 37, but was now unnoticed ; some big wagons loaded to a giddy height with chair-frames had darkened the room ; a milk-cart had zigzagged along the road, dispensing small tin cans to its various customers ; half a dozen other carts of one sort or another had passed, all with a noise and a rattle that were wanting in the clean, even trot of this particular pair of horses and the light roll of the wheels that followed ; and yet these brought Pen hurriedly to her feet, trying with trembling hands to remedy rough hair and rumpled frocks and displaced furniture.

That carriage was not unknown in Purton Street ; for the last month it had frequently been seen there, almost as often lately as the doctor's shabby brougham, whose broken-kneed horse pulled up of its own accord at No. 37. But, before proceeding further, I had better explain how it was that this apparition of sleek, well-groomed horses and fashionably built brougham, every inch of whose glossy coats and shining panels and silver-plated harness

told of West End affluence, was to be seen in the sordid, shabby, little street in Dalston, and I will take advantage of the few moments occupied by the coachman in drawing up his horses with beautiful precision on exactly the right spot, an art so difficult to arrive at by amateur coachmen, who generally hit the *juste milieu* between the house they aim at and the next to right or left, and either grate against the curb or steer so clear of it that they have to hail the servant who opens the door with a quarter-deck shout from the middle of the road. But the precision is not the only thing to wonder at and admire in Miss Percival's coachman; we should also note the wooden expression of indifference and the apparent stiffness of neck which is to be observed in him as in all well-trained coachmen, not turning his head an inch either to the right or left to look at the surroundings, which might be Buckingham Palace or a pigsty for all that he knows or cares, and likewise being apparently unconscious or indifferent as to whether the occupant of the carriage, safely piloted through the wild hubbub and confusion of the City, gets out or remains in, that being no concern of his, but the business of the tall footman in an unbelievably long drab coat, who gets down, touches his hat at the carriage door, and then gives

as artistic a performance on the knocker of No. 37 as that very inferior instrument will permit, and then comes back with another touch of the hat to open the carriage door, and turn back the big lion-skin rug which has been protecting Miss Percival from the inclemency of the weather.

Miss Percival is aunt to Tre and Pen, Aunt Penelope, though even now they were not sufficiently used to her velvets and furs and clear, cold eyes to venture to call her so, or hardly to believe that she could in any way be of the same order of creation as they were. She was sister too to "mother" — to the white, still mother lying upstairs in the little bedroom, with the calm content of death on her waxen lips. People used to say the two sisters were wonderfully alike, though Pen would deny it angrily, almost fiercely, with tears of indignation in her eyes; though unprejudiced observers would have said it was a great compliment to the wan, weary woman, whatever it might have been when she and Penelope were girls together.

Yes, girls together, sisters — only sisters too, without mother or sister to share the love between them, and yet, till six weeks ago, they had not met for sixteen years.

No doubt the blame was entirely due to Mrs. Brand, and she received it from all right-minded

people ; but, dear reader, if you and I are not quite right-minded in this respect, we may shelter ourselves under the grim ægis of death — *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* — and love and pity her instead. There was but one opinion on the subject when Theresa Percival, not quite eighteen, ran away with her drawing-master. She had just left school and was to be presented at the next drawing-room, and come out with all the pomp and ceremony which had attended Penelope's *début* the year before ; her presentation dress had come home, and the girl had stood decked out in the "soft sheen of satin and glimmer of pearls," light clouds of tulle and snowy feathers ; and the admiring beholders whispered that no lovelier *débutante* would kiss her Majesty's hand that season, and no one had noticed the strange, frightened look in the girl's face and the wistful quiver of her lips.

But, two days after that rehearsal, she was sought for in vain, and a note, in trembling characters, with more than one blot where a tear had fallen, told how her life's happiness was bound up with Louis Brand ; that she knew it was useless to ask her parents' consent, so she could only ask them to forgive and forget their wretched, little daughter, Theresa.

There was no doubt the Percivals bore the blow

excellently. Society noticed some gray threads in Mrs. Percival's smooth hair that were not there before, and fancied that Colonel Percival stooped a little more than of old, and that Penelope carried her head higher, with a haughty look in her eyes, as if to defy remark on their wounded pride. The Percivals had always been such a proud family, their line went back through generation before generation, with honor unstained and untarnished, and their arms had been quartered with all the best and oldest in the kingdom.

And this miserable girl had brought disgrace on them, and for what? An artist fellow with a black mustache and a velvet coat and a would-be Italian appearance, when any one who cared to ask knew that his father kept a shop in Bristol.

But the Percivals behaved very well, indeed Mrs. Percival's conduct may be described as heroic, for everything went on just as usual; with one great exception, the whole brilliant programme for the season was carried out to the last iota. Mrs. Percival even went to that very drawing-room and presented a niece, without an outward sign of the sick, wounded mother's heart under the *moiré* and diamonds; she went through the whole round of balls and dinners and fêtes and operas. She never shirked a single engagement; could any

Spartan matron have done more? Only Theresa's name was never mentioned again ; when once that little, hastily scrawled, tear-blotted note was crumpled up and thrown into the fire no further reference was made to her ; her name never passed her mother's lips. No useless efforts were made to retrieve the false step, no bitter reproaches or cruel valedictory words were sent after the culprit ; only the curtain of silence was dropped between her and her family, and every belonging of hers that might have recalled her to their minds was swept out of sight, and for sixteen years her name was never mentioned. Did they ever relent? No, I think not, till it was too late. You see, every one said they were in the right, and they firmly believed it themselves, and perhaps it was so ; and they could not understand that that was the very reason why they could more easily have relented, as it is so much easier for the injured to make the first advances than the injurer.

Perhaps if Theresa Brand had come begging forgiveness and help it might have been different, but then she was proud too, and, all the more because she was poor and struggling and not always very happy, and hungered and thirsted after a word or a look from her own people, she kept carefully and scrupulously away, avoiding the barest chance

of the meeting which might so easily have come about even in this great, full world. Once I think Mrs. Percival was not very far from relenting, when, one Christmas, a letter arrived with the London post-mark and directed in a hand all the more familiar because it had not been seen for four years — which, I am afraid, sounds Irish, but is true all the same.

Inside there was only a curl of the softest, most golden hair, and on the paper containing it were the words, "For grandmamma from little Pen."

She stood a long time looking at that golden curl, and perhaps her eyes were not quite clear enough to see how soft and bright it was, for there was a troublesome moisture that dimmed them more than once that Christmas morning, the morning of all others when mothers' hearts must need be soft. But not even that would unlock those closed lips from their four years' silence, and when at last, a few years later, those poor lips were trying to frame the daughter's name, the power had been taken away. She was struck with paralysis one morning and died in the evening without recovering power of speech, though the nurse, who was with her, told how, through that long day, the poor lips tried and tried to form some word, and the eyes looked with a

terrible appeal into the faces of those by the bedside, who could not understand what she meant. Penelope was away in Scotland and, though she was telegraphed for, arrived too late to see her mother alive ; and as for Colonel Percival he was so entirely unmanned by this sudden blow that he had to be kept entirely out of the sick-room, where his irrepressible, hysterical grief distressed the patient, even through the numbness of mind and body that was deepening every hour.

The arrangements for the funeral all fell upon Penelope, as her father was sunk into a sort of stupor of grief ; but, if the thought of her sister crossed her mind then, she did not know where to write to her, and perhaps she took it for granted that she would see the notice in the morning papers and would write or come. But the "Times" and "Morning Post" were not much in the way of Mrs. Brand, and it was not till nearly three months after, that a lady in mourning arrived at Highfield station and walked up to the little, old church, and found her way to the corner where generation after generation of Percivals rest under the great, ugly, flat tombs. Near one of these, where the fresh lettering showed that Mary, wife of Philip Percival, had departed this life August 10th, that same year, the stranger sat in the damp November grass for

nearly an hour, and, when she went, left a wreath of such costly beauty that many of the Highfield people came to look and wonder, and the Hall gardener himself (and who knew better?) wagered that it had cost a pretty penny. No one recognized her, and, if it had not been for that wreath, the few who noticed her would have thought that she was not of much account, for her dress was shabby and she did not take a fly from the station.

And after that the time passed on again, and Penelope was mistress at Highfield Hall and her father's right hand ; for the Colonel was never the same man after his wife's death, feeble in body and a little bit childish in mind, needing all the support that his stately, dignified, self-contained daughter was so capable of giving. And so sixteen years passed away and the sisters never met. Think of it, dear reader, sixteen years out of this short life, with all the love and tenderness and comfort they might have given and received ; and the loss in not having *given* the love is more grievous really than not receiving it, more irretrievable, more disastrous.

And when the meeting and reconciliation came it was too late. It was quite by chance — if there is such a thing as chance — that Penelope Percival heard of her sister's illness. It was at one of

the winter exhibitions of pictures, when she was spending a few days in London, that her eye was caught by a name among the exhibitors which arrested her attention, "Evening in North Devon" by Louis Brand. It was quite a small picture and pretty, without any particular talent in it, and the lady who was with Miss Percival, and who was a connoisseur in art and quite a recent acquaintance of Penelope's, wondered at the fixed attention with which she regarded the picture.

"Louis Brand?" she said. "Ah! it was about him that I heard such a sad story the other day: the usual thing, a wife in the last stage of consumption and a large family nearly starving. — Ah! look at this, No. 340, "A Gourmand." Isn't it fine? the expression of that sweep's face and the dog looking over his shoulder at the mutton pie! Capital! capital!"

But that afternoon Miss Percival's carriage first electrified the humble dwellers in Purton Street, Dalston, and the knocker at No. 37 was roused out of its usual indolent habit of giving one bang to announce the milk or the tax-collector, and made its first essay at a West End fantasia.

But even if Mrs. Brand had not been so ill that reconciliation came too late. But perhaps you may say it is never too late to be reconciled, and

in one sense you are right ; but it is very soon too late to get any happiness or pleasure out of a reconciliation. Fancy what that meeting might have been six days or six weeks or even six months after their parting ; think how the two girls would have clung together and kissed and clung again, with such a store of sympathy and tender reproach and loving explanation. Even after six years it might have been just possible, but after sixteen years what could you expect when every day had been building up between them, little by little, a wall of separate interests, different experiences, loves and hates, in which the other could have no share ; sufferings and pleasures which the other would hardly comprehend, much less sympathize with ?

And, added to this, Mrs. Brand was past caring. She had longed with a sickening craving at times to look into her mother's face, to show her bonny, little Pen to her grandfather, to hold her sister's hand and feel her kisses on her cheek, but that was long ago, and now she turned away from that sister's kiss which seemed cold and formal and lifeless, and from the comforts with which Miss Percival would gladly have surrounded her, to lay her tired head on her husband's shoulder, with its threadbare velvet coat ; for, after all, though he

might have been careless and improvident and inconsiderate, he had loved her, and his love had been all her happiness during those sixteen years, nearly half her lifetime ; and it was Pen's hand she felt for when sight and sense were failing, and to her, child as she was, that she committed the little sister Tre. "Take care of her, dear," she whispered ; and when Penelope would have taken the little, rosy, sleeping child from the bed where she lay by her dying mother's side, she shook her head with a smile that cut like a sword to that sister's heart.

"Don't trouble, dear," she said. "I like to have her here, and when — Pen will take care of her."

CHAPTER II.

AUNT PENELOPE.

IT has taken so long to explain the presence of Miss Percival's carriage in Purton Street, that if, in the mean time, the door had not been opened and Miss Percival admitted, I think that even the coachman, with his stiff neck and regulation manner, would have turned his head to see the reason. But Eliza, the maid-of-all-work, with the natural desire of her class to be the first to tell bad news, which seems to have been a characteristic of human nature as long ago as the time of David, when Ahimahaz longed to carry the news of Absalom's death, flew to open the door, before the man's hand was off the knocker, and she had the corner of her dirty apron to her eyes, and, on her lips, the usual hackneyed words by which we try to soften, in our vulgar way, the grim simplicity of death.

There had been nothing in the outside aspect to prepare Miss Percival; the blinds were not pulled down, except in the upper room, where they were

generally so ; and the day before Mrs. Brand had seemed a little better—the last flickering up of the strength that often precedes the final extinguishing. But 'Liza did not get any of the expected effects, which would have added so much to the interest of the story, when she described the scene afterwards ; Miss Percival did not “swound away ;” she did not throw up her hands and give a cry “as would have cut you to the heart to hear ;” she did not turn “as white as a sheet” or “tremble like a leaf ;” but she just swept past the girl in the narrow passage and went into the sitting-room, even drawing away her skirts from contact with the coal-scuttle, which 'Liza had upset in her haste to answer the door.

Her coming had startled the children's tears away, and I am afraid this was not the first time she had seen Tre with a dirty face, and Pen had no traditions in her young life of the proper authorized behavior in times of affliction, only an inborn sense of courtesy, and a remembrance of mother's gracious reception of visitors, however untimely ; so she came forward with a little, difficult smile, to extricate for her aunt's use a chair that had been enacting the part of tender in the train, and she made some little mechanical remark about the

weather being bad and hoping that her aunt's cold was better.

"But children have no hearts," Miss Percival thought, as she sat down by the table, showing by this judgment that she was as ignorant of human nature in one way as 'Liza was in another, the one by expecting stereotyped expressions of grief in children, the other by looking for vulgar and violent manifestations of sorrow in a lady. To be sure she had very little experience of children, except the village school children at Highfield, who bobbed terrified, little courtesies to her, regarding her as a condensed form of the "betters," to whom they were to order themselves lowly and reverently. She also thought she knew a good deal of the members of the Girls' Friendly Society, to whom she gave most excellent advice, which perhaps might have been of more use if she had known anything really of the muddling, young lives with their small, insignificant troubles and foolish pleasures, and could have sympathized in the smallest degree with those stupid, little drudges whom she was desirous of helping to better things.

She had not felt attracted to these children of her sister's, they could not exactly be treated as friendly girls or national school children, and she had made up her mind long ago as to what Louis

Brand's children were likely to be, and all through her life Miss Percival's conclusions had been right ; and no one, herself least of all, had ever doubted the Q. E. D. that followed her deductions, or, at any rate, had ever convinced her that she was in the wrong ; so that not even Pen's delicate, little face and gentle voice, or Tre's sweet, childish grace could quite convince her that they were not the underbred, common, little creatures she had imagined. Louis Brand's children were not likely to have deep feelings, and, after the first rather mechanical kiss on the cheeks, where, if she had noticed it, she might have found the tears were scarcely dry, she sat down by the table, involuntarily straightening the table-cloth and stroking out the creases in a way that conveyed a keen reproach to Pen for its untidiness, though indeed Miss Percival was quite unconscious of her act ; or of the shabby, disordered room ; or of Pen's anxious little face ; or of Tre, with a firm hold on her sister's protecting frock, gazing at her with big eyes full of awe and reverence.

Her thoughts had gone back to old days at Highfield, when she and her sister were all in all to one another ; to happy, girlish, light-hearted days, before life had settled down into the dignified monotony it had gradually assumed. Those

days did not seem so far off now as they had done when her sister was living, and when every word and look reminded her of the gulf those sixteen years had made between them. The Theresa who was just dead was the girl-sister, the playfellow, the confidante who had shared everything with her, and been in such perfect sympathy that she had seemed a second self; and not the weary, worn-out woman, who had seen so much trouble and poverty and loneliness, and who had a drawing-master artist husband, and rough, troublesome children.

Presently she got up and went upstairs, up the narrow, steep staircase. She gave a little irritable shudder as she passed a door from which the sound of men's voices and the smell of tobacco smoke proceeded. It would have been odious to her to come across Louis Brand making a pretence of grief over his dead wife; but at any rate he might have had the decency to keep up appearances, and not to be smoking, and probably drinking with some of his boon companions within an hour or two of his wife's death.

She hastened on to the bedroom, where the disorder of a sick-room had given place to the chill tidiness of death.

"It is not mother," little Pen had said, as they

led her away from the room ; but Miss Percival gave a low cry of glad recognition — “ Theresa ! ” — as she came to the bedside ; for the still, white face had regained so much of the youth that it had lost in life, that it might almost have been the young sister who had passed out of Penelope’s life sixteen years ago.

Those ten minutes by her sister’s side made nearly as great a difference in the living as death had done in the dead face ; for though years had not dealt harshly with Penelope Percival, and though many of her friends maintained that she was handsomer now than she had been at eighteen, she had seemed as changed to the eyes of her sister as Theresa had done to her, and if, as some people love to think, the souls of the departed linger yet a little beside their mortal habitations, perhaps Theresa Brand may have gazed into her sister’s altered face, and recognized the Penelope of old, happy days. But for me, dear reader, I would rather think of glad souls rising up quickly and going as Mary did, when they said, “ The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” I would rather think that the rest of the souls of the righteous, which are in the hand of the Lord, is not disturbed by the clamor of mourning and bitter lamentation, any more than it can be disquieted

by the lack of them, for "there shall no torment touch them."

But whether or no the soul of one sister could see the other's face, certainly the sight of the dead face spoke to Penelope's heart, and inspired a gentler feeling for the children below, who seemed now more the dead sister's children, with the blood of the Percivals running in their veins, and so with possibilities about them, than the children of Louis Brand, of whom, of course, nothing could be expected ; and, as she stooped to kiss the cold forehead, she whispered, "They shall be my children, Theresa. I will be a mother to them."

The feeling was very warm in her heart just then, —so warm that it was not to be chilled by passing that door, from which came renewed puffs of tobacco smoke and voices which seemed to rise above the natural, subdued tones of sorrow. It was certainly unfortunate that 'Liza's pity for the children should have taken the form of shrimps for tea, and those of a rather strongly flavored sort ; and also that shrimps being a very unusual luxury with Tre, and tea-time having, that day, been delayed to the extremest limits of human endurance, she was discovered, when Miss Percival opened the door, entirely engrossed in stripping off rather limp brown shells, and consuming very thick bread

and butter, and rapidly becoming indued with stickiness and shrimpiness in all sorts of unexpected places, such as her elbows and the back of her neck.

Miss Percival was not of a gushing nature, but she would have liked to have taken the children into her arms, and kissed them, and told them they should find their mother again in her; but it was not to be expected that she could carry out this intention on such a very shrimpy little object, and so perhaps her words sounded rather cold and formal, as she stood by the table looking down at Tre, at a safe distance from sticky fingers.

"Children," she said, "I will try to make up to you for your great loss."

There was silence after this, and she felt strangely awkward under the gaze of Tre's great eyes, as she sat with her bread and butter arrested on its way to her mouth. It was just such a pause as can only be filled by a kiss, or by catching a child suddenly to one's heart, which, of course, was now out of the question.

Pen, inopportunately, poured out a cup of tea, and offered it with a little hesitating gesture.

"No, thank you," Miss Percival went on, clearing her throat and feeling that sentiment in these

circumstances was out of place. "I am going to take care of you now, and I will take you down to Highfield, and you will live with me and your grandfather, and — be very happy little girls." She added the last sentence quickly, for Tre's eyes were opening wider and wider, with an expression that was certainly not pleasure; and she dropped her bread and butter, and doubled her fists, and clinched her young teeth, with the evident intention of resisting sturdily if any attempt should be made to carry her off there and then — an idea which she unjustly suspected her aunt of harboring.

"Don't be naughty, Tre," Pen expostulated in very trembling tones. She understood better than the child did what her aunt meant, and knew that it was not to be an immediate carrying off into captivity; but the notion was none the less terrible to her, and she could not, on the spur of the moment, conjure up any appearance of satisfaction.

"I will come to-morrow and see your father," Miss Percival continued, "and tell him my intentions. I can't stop now," she added hurriedly, for just at that moment a door was heard to open above, and the sound of voices and of a heavy step on the stairs.

"Good-by, I will come to-morrow;" and she

hastened out, purposely turning her head away and ignoring a tall man who stood at the foot of the stairs to let her pass.

"I could not have spoken civilly to him," she said to herself, as the carriage rolled away.

But it was not Louis Brand who stood there, almost within sweep of her silken skirt, it was a tall man, with a broad, kindly, freckled, ugly face, and rough, dry, red hair that stood up in a mop over his head, and curious light eyes, with thick sandy lashes round them.

As soon as the door closed behind Miss Percival he was in the little parlor, and had gathered up Tre, shrimps and all, in his long, strong arms, and had set her on his knee, and had an arm free in a second to draw Pen in with them, and let her choke down her sobs and hide her face against his shoulder.

"My poor, poor, poor, little, mitherless bairns!" he said. And then almost upset Tre from her perch on his knee, in hasty efforts to reach his pocket-handkerchief, which, when it was unearthed, large and yellow and silk and spotted, from his tail pocket, did duty all round to wipe up wet faces, and they were soon composed enough to return to the shrimps, while he did not despise the cup of tea which Aunt Penelope had rejected.

And by and by they even grew a little cheerful, and the sound of a laugh reached the silent room above, where there was no one to listen, a sound which would not have troubled her if it could have penetrated to the hearing of the dead, for often and often she had greeted that laugh with a smile of relief and a thought — “Ah ! there is Sandy down there, the children will be safe and happy. God bless him !”

CHAPTER III.

A FIRESIDE TALK.

BY and by, when Tre was in bed, that first sad going to bed without mother's good-night kiss, and with the bitter, little doubt if it were right still to let her ask God to bless dear mamma and make her well ; when that was over, Pen came down and found, to her relief, Sandy still sitting by the fire in the little parlor, staring into the red caverns and holes in the coals, which he had heaped up with a lavish profusion very unusual at No. 37.

There was mother's footstool close by his side, and Pen sat down on it and rested her elbow on his knee, and laid her head on it, a very aching little head under its ruffled plaits of fair hair.

Sandy did not attempt any consolation beyond now and then putting out a large, freckled forefinger to stroke the head on his knee, and when a sob shook the slight girlish shoulders and he guessed that tears were falling, he dropped the comforting yellow handkerchief into her lap and

took no further notice. I wonder if Sandy had been glib with consoling words, and had been able to coin into beautiful phrases the mine of love and pity in his heart, whether it would have done more to comfort the child than this silent sympathy?

The sobs quieted down after a bit, and Sandy fancied she was asleep, she sat so still, and he could not see her face; but presently she stirred and sat up, clasping her hands round her knees and looking up at him, with a face wonderfully like her mother's, Sandy noticed, having never observed the slightest resemblance before; but it is remarkable how death will sometimes stamp a likeness on the survivors, which the closest intercourse in life has failed to do.

"Sandy," she said, "do you think father will let us go?"

"Go where?"

"To Highfield with Aunt Penelope. She says she is going to take us to live there with her and grandpapa. Tre was naughty about it just now when I was undressing her, and she said she would not go, and that she hates Aunt Penelope. And I scolded her as well as I could and said it was very kind of Aunt Penelope to want to have us, and that Highfield was a beautiful place, and that mother loved it better than any other; and then

Tre cried, and said she wanted to go with mother, and oh ! Sandy, I feel every bit the same as she does, only twenty times worse."

Sandy whistled softly in a sympathizing way, very encouraging to confidences, and Pen went on : " I 've been thinking and thinking and trying to make up my mind to it, and to think I should like it, and be happy, and that it would be much better for Tre, and that she would grow up a really proper young lady, not like me, you know, Sandy."

A little indignant grunt of dissent from Sandy broke in here, but she did not stay to argue the point.

" I think Tre would very soon be like those children we used to see in the park, when you took us up there last spring. When her hair is nicely done and she has her best frock on, she looks just like them. I know she is rough sometimes, and Aunt Penelope shudders when she comes tumbling into the room anyhow, and her hands will get dirty and her hair untidy ; but still she is very young and may improve," said Pen, with all the wisdom and experience of fifteen, at which great age improvement is, of course, out of the question.

" Mother has told me so much about Highfield,

and always how nice it is, and how pretty, and all that; but I always felt to hate it somehow, and to think it must be hard and cold and dull, and not a bit like home."

And yet all the child's idea of home was, as Sandy remembered, marvelling, this poor, little, shabby house in Purton Street, or one at Notting Hill only a few shades better, where poverty was always casting its chill shadow, and where the mother's sweet face was the only brightness, and that of sunset's most pathetic light telling of coming night.

"I wonder if mother would wish us to go? She never said anything about it, but always that I was to take care of Tre, and comfort father; and I don't think Aunt Penelope likes father, so I don't suppose she would want him to come to Highfield."

"Perhaps not," assented Sandy, who had been now and then let behind the scenes, and witnessed the antipathy that the lazy, undisciplined artist cherished for his stately, conventional sister-in-law; and it did not require much penetration to divine that the antipathy was mutual.

"I wish I had asked her! I wish I knew!" said Pen, with such great, passionate yearning in her eyes and on her lips as might, so Sandy thought,

almost have pierced through the dark veil and found the mother, even in the sweet unbroken peace she had reached.

And Sandy found it so hard to know what to advise, or to guess what was in the mother's heart when she went away and left her little girls to a father who, to speak in the mildest terms, was so unsatisfactory, as that mother herself had surely by bitter experience cause to know. There was no doubt that, from a purely sensible point of view, the very best thing for the children would be to be taken clear away from Purton Street; if Pen's eyes had not been fixed on Sandy's face he would have said so in a moment. Louis Brand was not at all the person to take care of the children, Sandy could see that plain enough, though the two men had been friends now for several years. Though Mrs. Brand had been ill so long, and latterly so ill that she did not apparently take any active part in the management of the house, it was wonderful how now, directly her presence was withdrawn, an indescribable air of discomfort and want of gear had crept into the scene. It was not that it had ever been a cut-and-dried clockwork establishment such as Aunt Penelope loved to keep going at Highfield, where everything moved with perfect precision, and where five minutes lost was

a crime, and half an inch out of position an enormity; it would have been an impossibility to accommodate Louis Brand to such conditions; but still there had been some rule, some order maintained in the little house, a centre round which things had turned; a hand, though a very light one, on the reins; a court of appeal, very gentle and tender, yet whose decisions were final.

Perhaps if Mrs. Brand had still been there, if the silence in the room above had been that of sleep instead of death, Sandy would not have noticed that the tea-things were left on the side-board, or that the front door was ajar, and that 'Liza had slipped out to the milk-shop round the corner to tell the events of the day to a sympathizing audience, leaving a tallow candle on the table in the passage flaring and guttering in the draught; but still straws show the direction of the current, and these and half a dozen other almost imperceptible trifles made it evident to Sandy that there was no longer a mistress in the house. He had a sort of fidgety feeling of responsibility which he never had felt before, as if he ought to give 'Liza a bit of his mind, or offer to carry down the tea-things, or insist on Pen's going to bed; anyhow he could not make up his mind to leave the child sitting there by herself, there was something

so very lonely in the little figure by the hearth, where the fire was burning low.

Sandy could only just remember his own mother, and that with no particularly tender feeling, and her death had not, as far as he recollected, cost him any acute pain, except so far as concerned the pair of new boots in which he was taken to her funeral, and which were so tight, that they impressed the scene on his memory effectually ; but he felt the loss for little Pen sharply, in some points perhaps with an intensity beyond her own, being more conscious maybe of what it meant to her and Tre.

Pen's head had sunk down again on his knee when he could find no answer to her question, "Would mother wish us to go?" so Sandy could ponder the matter without prejudice from her eager eyes.

Ten years ago he had come across Louis Brand in a small village in North Devon, where the artist was sketching, and where Sandy was fishing and idling and taking holiday. The men had been thrown together constantly, and that strange thing, friendship, had sprung up between them.

Love is curious and unaccountable enough, but then it is allowed to be a madness, so it is not to be argued about ; but friendship is supposed to be

a reasonable and calm exchange of regard and affection founded on mutual respect and sympathy of tastes. As a rule it is nothing of the kind. That saying that you can know a man by his friends is as untrue as many other old sayings that pretend to be of universal application. The most incongruous natures are yoked together by friendship; the ox and the ass jog along side by side, out of step, to the end of the long furrow of life; and the astonishing thing is that this union should last when it is purely voluntary and could be severed on either side at a moment's notice. They are not born to it like relations; they are not irrevocably pledged to it like married people; each sees the other's faults, he by no means exaggerates his virtues; he does not take his advice; he disapproves of his politics, his religious opinions, his style of dress, his personal appearance, his behavior; but friends they remain to the end of the chapter, the usual end of this mortal chapter, till death them do part; and then the survivor carries the ache and the want about with him perhaps as long as or longer than a lovesick swain carries that broken heart of his of which we hear so much, and the torments of which are described, from every point of view, in prose and poetry, in every language under the sun, and call

forth sympathy on all sides ; while but little can be spared for the pains of disappointed or bereaved friendship, which, I am inclined to think, are often more severe and generally more real.

So Sandy Maclaren and Louis Brand became friends. Sandy, simple and real and honest and true, and Louis Brand — well, perhaps not exactly the reverse ; but in describing his character, however favorably, those are not the words you would pick out. But I never could judge Louis Brand as hardly as some have done, for his wife loved him so ; and especially just now, when his loyal champion is silent, I would treat him tenderly.

The friendship was renewed when the men met again in London, and Louis Brand took Sandy home with him one evening and introduced him to his wife, an honor that was not accorded to many of the acquaintances that Louis picked up during his sketching expeditions. Sandy remembered that evening so well, every detail came back to his mind as he sat with Pen's head on his knee. It had taken him by surprise that Louis Brand had a wife at all, but he never had imagined such a wife as this, such a gracious, gentle, lady wife ; and as for little five-year-old Pen, the moment she put her little hand in his, and committed to his care the broken arm of her doll, he became her de-

voted slave ; and though the arrival of Tre on the scene enlarged the number of his sovereign ladies, Pen still retained her supremacy in Sandy's heart.

They were living up at Notting Hill at that time, when Sandy first saw Pen and her mother ; circumstances were better then ; Brand was working more steadily, and there was a certain hopefulness and expectation of better times coming, which died out in later days. Looking back, Sandy could see how by degrees they had come down ; one by one little indulgences had been given up, always, he remembered with a sigh, those which concerned Mrs. Brand and Pen went first. The change to the sea in the summer was a thing of the past even then, but Louis Brand was of course obliged, in the way of business, to go off sketching in lovely scenery and refreshing air. Sometimes Sandy would notice that Pen ran to open the door when he came, and that Mrs. Brand's face was more tired-looking and her hands rough and discolored, and then he guessed that the servant was a luxury they were trying to dispense with. And then the only way to help, though he would gladly have cleaned the knives and carried up coal-scuttles, was to keep out of the way, so as not to make any extra work, and to invite Louis Brand to dine with him as often as

he could, knowing that it was any discomfort to her husband that Mrs. Brand felt most acutely. The only time Sandy ever saw her break down was when there had been some failure over the dinner, and then her lips trembled and her eyes filled up with tears.

“I am such a wretchedly bad cook,” she said. “Why don’t they teach girls something useful at those schools?”

And Sandy was glad to remember how she was comforted then by her husband holding those poor, little, hard-worked hands and recalling those old school days when she had learned of him, not to draw — she never could draw a straight line nor a smooth curve — but that more beautiful art, that nobler science of love, at which she was an apt pupil; while Sandy drew little Pen away and pretended to be as absorbed as she was in the sparrows on the window-sill. There were other times, I am afraid, when Mrs. Brand had not such comfort, when her husband added to her burden by his thoughtlessness or discontent; but Sandy only guessed dimly at these occasions, from a word let slip by Pen, or a half-joking self-accusation by Louis Brand himself; never from Mrs. Brand, who, I do not fancy, ever even to herself blamed her husband.

When they were moving down to Dálston, Sandy was changing his lodgings at the same time, and found some in a street hard by Purton Street, and, after that, hardly a day passed without his coming to the Brands on one pretext or another, and latterly without any pretext at all.

Pen was half asleep by the time that Sandy's thoughts had come so far in his review of his friendship with the Brands. At any rate strange dream threads were being woven in with her thoughts when Sandy stirred and gave a great yawn and rubbed his eyes, which had certainly looked quite wide awake the minute before, as he gazed over Pen's head into the fire.

"Hollo!" he said, "I shall be asleep if I sit here much longer."

And Pen got up, looking at him with eyes that were quite unconscious how near they had been to sleep themselves, and rather reproachful to him for thinking of such a thing as sleep in all the sorrow.

"You see I'm such a sleepy fellow," he said apologetically, "and besides," with a sudden bright idea, "I want to be up with the earliest of larks to-morrow to go and get some flowers for—her. Would you like to come too? but you will not be awake."

She gave a little indignant gesture disclaiming all possibility of sleep.

“Well, anyhow you must go right up to bed now or I won’t take you. Never mind about sleeping, but go to bed and I’ll see what the signor is about before I turn in. Off with you, little Pen, I think I know what *she* would say to such a little white face.”

And unwillingly Pen was persuaded to go up to the room where Tre lay sleeping, as sweetly as if there were no such things as sorrow or death to awake to by and by; while Sandy turned into the studio, with the comforting conviction that soon another head would be sleeping beside Tre’s, equally unconscious of loneliness and motherlessness.

CHAPTER IV.

FLOWERS FOR HER.

IT hardly seemed more than a few minutes to Pen from the time when she had heard the studio door close and had thrown herself down half undressed on the bed by sleeping 'Tre, and she was not conscious of having slept, when she was roused by a low knocking at the door, and started up with the dim feeling that mother was wanting her, followed instantaneously by the bitter memory that mother would never want her any more.

"Pen," said Sandy's voice, "it is four o'clock and I am just going to start, but I dare say you 're too tired, and I will bring you some flowers."

"No," she said, "I 'd rather come."

It was quite dark, and, as Pen struck a light and dressed herself, she had a numb, dazed sort of feeling that night and day must needs be all mixed up and confused now that mother was dead. Neither did she wonder at Sandy having been able to enter the house at that hour, though she did not

know that the talk in the studio had gone on so long that Sandy had only had an hour's sleep on the sofa and had never gone home at all. But when the world is all turned topsy-turvy why should one be surprised at anything?

She dressed as quickly as she could and went down, finding Sandy waiting for her in the passage with a large plaid to wrap round her ; and he took her hand as they passed out into the street and put it under his arm, an action that made her feel more grown up than she had ever done before, and painfully conscious that her steps were shorter than his long stride, and that she fell out of pace with him every now and then, and that it was beneath her dignity to give a little run occasionally, as she might have done if he had been merely holding her hand.

How strange and unnatural the streets looked too ; so still, it seemed as if the whole world might be dead like mother.

“ Ne'er saw I, never felt a calm so deep,
Dear God, the very houses seem asleep,
And all that mighty heart is lying still.”

The gas lamps seemed to look down with surprise at these two untimely disturbers of their solitude, and the tramp of a policeman's steps coming

down a side street had quite a solemn and awful sound in her ears. She could hardly recognize the familiar streets where by day she knew every shop and turn, and could thread her way, without a thought, among the hurrying crowds, as she went about her small marketings; but now that the shops were all closed and the crowds had disappeared, she would have been at a loss to find even the houses she knew best.

As they went on, the world no longer seemed inhabited only by themselves and stray policemen, strange, uncanny-looking figures passed them, night birds, homeless some of them, tattered bundles of rags starting up from dark entries and hurrying away, as if Pen's pitiful young eyes had been a policeman's lantern warning them to move on; then there were some late revellers, homeward bound, some of them unsteady in their gait and uncertain which side they would pass; but by degrees a more wholesome element was mixed with these, workmen on their way to their work, with their tools on their shoulders, gathering round the early coffee stalls, which looked cheerful and warm with their stoves and steaming cups of coffee, which likewise smelt nice and fragrant as Pen and Sandy passed by.

They were quite beyond Pen's geographical

knowledge by this time, and indeed she had no idea where they were going to get flowers for "her," beyond a general idea that it must be somewhere in the country, perhaps that place where Sandy took her and Tre last spring, where there were bluebells, and a cuckoo calling, and a nest with large-mouthed, ugly, little birds in it. But Sandy kept on steadily with that loose swinging stride of his, and Pen was a good, little walker and not easily tired. Now they came to something awake and stirring, the newspaper offices were full of life and movement, and, outside, rows of carts were waiting to carry off the papers the moment they were out of the press. Otherwise the houses were dark, except here and there, where a light shone out of an upstairs window, telling of early rising, or perhaps, late watching by the sick. Then carts began to pass, clattering milk-carts and wagons loaded high with cabbages, and with a fresh country look about their smock-frocked drivers, and these became more frequent as they approached Covent Garden market, where, though it was still dark and the stars shining overhead, life seemed to have begun in earnest, carts and wagons in all directions, with steaming horses tossing their nose-bags recklessly into the faces of passers-by; country-women in

print sun-bonnets presiding over great stacks of wallflower and pyramids of tulips, surrounded by crowds of eager, chattering flower-girls, with their sharp London voices, and faces as sharp and as uncountrified. Over there the watercress wagons are unloading, and there the noise is louder than anywhere, for the Irish brogue mixes largely in the clamor, and the bareheaded women, with small plaid shawls over their shoulders and big aprons, push and jostle one another ; while small girls dive into the *mêlée* under the elbows of their elders, some of them so small and white and scantily clothed, and yet with such a grim resolution to make the very utmost of the halfpence they clutch in their hands, and fight and shriek and struggle with the best of them.

One of the women had set down her baby on the outskirts of the crowd, behind some heaped-up baskets, and the weird black-eyed imp had managed to roll or crawl out of the friendly shelter, and had been kicked or trodden on by some passers-by, and had set up a desolate, little yell, just as Pen and Sandy came up, a cry not likely to reach the mother in the thick of the crowd round the pump, where the watercresses were being washed.

Sandy had the little thing up in a moment.

"Hollo, old man, what's to pay?" and held it aloft to see if any one would claim the odd, little specimen, but no one seemed inclined to volunteer.

"What am I to do with the brat? Who's to find a mother for it among all these?"

The child was quite quiet in his arms, and had taken a firm hold of his coat with one grimy, little claw, but its face puckered up and a whimper began when Sandy offered to put it down on a heap of straw; and as they were stopping up the gangway and several busy passers-by had already rather indignantly jostled against them, there was nothing for it but to go on, little ragamuffin and all, past the great fragrant hampers of violets, primroses, cowslips and daffodils, to where the boxes of rarer flowers were discharging their contents almost in as great profusion: sheafs of pure arums and eucharis lilies, which have something sacred in their beauty; white azalea of such fragile loveliness that it seems meant for heaven alone; camellias which are altogether as earthly as azalea is heavenly, and suggest turnip flowers, forced turkey, and Strauss's vases; roses, primulas, spiræa, maidenhair. Pen stood in a perfect daze of delight at all the beauty, with tears slowly welling up into her eyes, partly pleasure and partly

with the prick of the thorn that would lie hid in all her pleasure for many a day, "if only mother could see it!" It would have been enough for her merely to look, she had been used all her life to be satisfied with the sight of pretty things without any thought of possession, and it quite took her breath away the lavish manner in which Sandy filled the empty basket he had brought, with flowers every one of which would have been cherished for days with scrupulous care, and treasured even when its beauty was a thing of the past, and its scent a memory.

But when their purchases were finished, and even Sandy thought they had enough flowers, the baby still remained on their hands and prevented their immediate return; so Sandy found an out-of-the-way corner and a seat on the shafts of a large yellow wagon, and the baby was provided with a bun from the coffee-stall, and Pen and Sandy did not find a cup of coffee and a bun come amiss, though Pen could hardly be persuaded to put down her basket of flowers even for the few minutes it took to consume the repast.

The dawn was stealing cold and wan into the sky, making the gas look dull and dissipated, and Pen was glad to wrap the shawl tightly round her, as the air was chill. The bun and Sandy's strong,

patient arms seemed to produce a wonderfully soothing effect, for before long his grubby, little burden was fast asleep, with one hand grasping the half-eaten bun, and the other still clutching Sandy's coat-sleeve, who, with his hat at the back of his head, and a smear across his forehead, was certainly not a very attractive object to look at. But Pen, from her seat on the opposite shaft of the wagon, seemed to find a sort of fascination about him, and kept watching him so fixedly, with her great sad eyes, that he grew quite embarrassed at last, and extricated one hand from the baby to run his fingers through his hair and straighten his hat.

"Hollo!" he said, "I did n't spend much time in tittivating before I started. Wants a razor, eh?"

But Pen was not thinking of his outer man, at any rate not in disparagement, for she said, "I was thinking, Sandy, and wondering why you never had a wife."

He laughed, and then grew red all over to the very ears, blushing like a school-girl.

"What put that in your head?"

"I was thinking," she went on, looking at him so straight over the arums and lilies in the basket in her arms, without a cloud coming over

the calm serenity of her earnest eyes, or a stain of color into the pure paleness of her cheeks, "that if I were older, you might have married me, and taken care of me and Tre instead of father."

CHAPTER V.

LOUIS BRAND'S CHILDREN.

MISS PERCIVAL certainly felt that she had got through her interview with "that artist fellow" with dignity and success, and she found him much more reasonable and less theatrical than she had expected. Gratitude, of course, she did not expect, though after all that had passed one would have thought that he would have been almost overwhelmed at the generosity of the offer to take his two daughters entirely off his hands, and educate and bring them up like ladies; and he only stood opposite to her in the squalid, little room, with no readable expression on his dusky, pale face, with his dark eyes fixed so persistently on one particular spot on the table-cloth, that Miss Percival found herself continually looking at the same place, where the rim of a damp cup had left a sort of crescent-moon mark, and a spot of ink added a star.

From time to time he bowed his head and gave an indistinct murmur of what Miss Percival inter-

puted as assent; and she was so far impressed with his sensible acquiescence in all her arrangements, that she refrained from doing more than hinting that, when the girls had once been received at Highfield, no further interference with them on their father's part could be tolerated, and that Colonel Percival would be willing to assist him to a reasonable extent *at a distance*.

"Of course," she said, "all details can be arranged later on." And she added after a moment's hesitation, "I—my father will be pleased if you will stop a day or two at Highfield after the funeral."

He gave a quick look up at her just then from the crescent mark on the cloth, and there was a tightening of the lips over his teeth, which to a reader of expression might have suggested mischief, but Miss Percival was short-sighted, and enjoyed the blessing or the curse of short sight, that she did not see the premonitory symptoms of human volcanoes, and, as most of these volcanoes subside without coming to an eruption, I think perhaps short sight is more of a blessing, as it saves its owner from needless apprehension. It would have done Miss Percival no immediate good to have known that, just across that narrow table, was a man who would have liked to wring her

neck ; who felt that hesitating invitation as more of an insult even than offering to bring his daughters up as ladies, and the hint that this could only be possible by separation from their father. He had been selfish and thoughtless enough, but he had known all along that his wife had given up much for love of him, and that she had craved and fretted after the old home, though I do not suppose he knew one hundredth part how much. In the early days of their marriage, when there were possibilities painting themselves constantly in rose-colored brightness before hopeful young minds ; when it was quite impossible to imagine hearts remaining stony forever ; when any post might bring a letter in a loved writing ; when to-morrow must needs be brighter than to-day, she used to describe, with loving minuteness, all the rooms and gardens at Highfield. "You would like that picture, Louis." "You would love that deep window-seat and the old colored panes in the glass," till at last he grew weary of these far-away beauties, when everything around them was poor and mean, and he let her see that it bored him ; and then she took to painting them over to herself in her long and frequent solitudes, taking one room after another methodically, and remembering every picture, chair, or ornament, even

going so far as the books on the shelves before which she used to kneel at family prayers, and with childish, wandering thoughts study the lettering on the backs of the big *Encyclopædia*, *Ast. Bom.*, *Bom. Bur.*, *Bur. Cli.*, and so on.

By and by she found a ready and never-wearied listener in Pen, who used to draw up her stool and rest her elbows on her mother's lap, and her chin in her hands, and look up into the smiling, expectant face above, and say, "Now tell me about the morning room at Highfield !" and would enter, quite gravely, into the discussion as to whether the pattern of the curtains were *convolvulus* or *jessamine*, and whether the high-backed chair stood between the windows or in the corner of the room.

Highfield was like fairyland to little Pen when described by mother, but it was very different when Aunt Penelope proposed to take her into it.

The only point on which Miss Percival detected any difference of opinion in the inscrutable dark face opposite her, was when she took it for granted that the little girls would not be present at their mother's funeral. She herself had not been present when her mother was buried ; it was not among the traditions of the Percival family that ladies should be present on these occasions. They were to have no share in the comfort and the hope

of the burial service, but to do their mourning at home, and be ready in composure and crape to receive the funeral party on their return. But Louis Brand had been apparently so acquiescent on every other point that Miss Percival did not contest this, though she felt convinced that there would be an undignified display of hysterical grief; but she resolved that she would so far sacrifice her personal feeling as to be present herself, so as to be a check on any unnecessary or theatrical exhibition.

Her interview with Pen was not so satisfactory. She found her in the little back-room having a lining tried on by a fussy, little dressmaker, who joined freely in the conversation with her mouth full of pins, in spite of Miss Percival's crushing inattention to her remarks. Miss Percival had been revolving the question of the mourning in her mind as she came along, debating whether she would send her maid down to see after it, or put it in the hands of her dressmaker in Maddox Street, but both of these worthies were too elegant to imagine comfortably in Purton Street. And when Miss Percival found that mourning of a sort was in course of preparation, she decided to let it alone, and trust to putting them into decent attire when they were safely at Highfield.

"Of course you will not have to wear the things afterwards," she said, looking through her double eyeglasses at the roll of strongly smelling black material and crape that lay on the table.

"No, I was just a-telling Miss Pen," put in the pin-obscured voice of the dressmaker, "it don't do to wear all one's best crape every day. Crape is horfull wear — ketches on everything and spoils. My gracious! and as for the dust! I've been telling her as she'll want a nice dress for common, to save her best for company like, or going out; you'll find some patterns there as I brought a purpose under the fashion book. Raise your arm a little, my dear, there — a bit more that way."

"You will only want one dress with some crape on it, Penelope," Miss Percival said icily, "the rest I will arrange when you are at Highfield."

"Dear, dear! did that pin run into you, my dear?" said the little dressmaker sympathetically, for Pen had given a little start and quiver that might well have been caused by sudden physical pain. "Poor lambs!" in a breathy aside to Miss Percival, "I know what it is to be motherless, and I can feel for them."

"The less you have now the better," Miss Percival went on. "I have made all the arrangements with your father."

But Pen made no reply, perhaps the exigencies of being fitted prevented her being more responsive, and that may also have been the reason why her face was kept so persistently turned away from Aunt Penelope; and there was something in the slim, young neck turned away, and the bare arm, slender almost to thinness, hanging by her side, that recalled her mother in the old days very vividly to Miss Percival's mind, when she was just such another slip of a girl; and the remembrance came back to her of some girlish misunderstanding between the two, and of a sudden reconciliation, when Theresa had come to her room half undressed at night and had thrown her soft, slender arms round her neck in such loving, frank apology, that the cause of offence was forgotten and forgiven before the clasping arms were loosed from her neck. Ah! that was twenty years ago, and those warm, clasping arms were cold and dead, crossed on the still breast with flowers of such lavish beauty, that those she had brought seemed poor and scanty and unworthy. Would the daughter's arms ever cling round her neck as the mother's used to do? It did not seem likely. She hardly felt as if she would care for it from Louis Brand's daughter.

How long that tiresome dressmaker was fum-

bling with those pins, as if it mattered if the frock fitted or not, or, for the matter of that, as if it were likely to fit at all, with all her pains. Miss Percival got up impatiently and went to find Tre, but if shrimps and tea had struck her the evening before as unfeeling and unbecoming the situation, what were her feelings now when she found the child leaning as far out of window as the laws of balance and Sandy's restraining hand would allow, to give biscuits to a poor, little, grinning monkey, who was perched on the railings and held out a dirty, little velvet cap in a furtive way with one cheek already much distended, in spite of the jerks from the hand of his master, who naturally wished for a share of the spoil.

It certainly was not conventional behavior in a house of mourning, and 'Liza herself would have seen the enormity of the action, though she and Miss Percival had not many common grounds of agreement, especially on points of etiquette. But Miss Percival did not know, how should she? that it was not mere childish forgetfulness of the dead mother upstairs, but just the very opposite, that prompted the action. For the last time the monkey had come and the organ had ground out that tiresome "Tommy Dodd" as it was doing now, the monkey had been invited in out of the

cold, foggy weather, and had sat on the end of mother's sofa warming himself and chattering softly to himself, and looking at mother out of those odd, wise, sad, little eyes, which have such a depth of melancholy in them in spite of their mischief.

"Don't hurt him," mother said, "be very gentle with him." And after that the children always called him "our monkey," and went quite long walks in quest of him, saving up stray sweets or halfpence, and halfpence in the Brand family were very stray, to bestow on him whenever they happened to light upon him.

So when Tre, peeping through the decently drawn blind to look at Aunt Penelope's horses, saw the organ man looking doubtfully up at the house, with a hesitating hand on the organ handle, and, catching sight of the little peeping face, gave an inquiring grin of that matchless Italian brilliancy that is so infectious, what could Tre do but smile back and nod? whereupon "Tommy Dodd" at once struck up, and the monkey began climbing round the area railings.

Of course Tre, suddenly pulled back into the room by Sandy when he saw who was standing at the door with a look of dignified disapproval, was utterly unable to explain the situation, and Sandy

was so entirely ignored that he could not venture to interfere, except to assist Tre's hurried effort to close the window and pull down the blind.

"You had better go to your sister in the back room," Miss Percival said ; and Tre slunk past her like a beaten hound, dimly aware of having committed some crime connected with the monkey, but very keenly conscious that Aunt Penelope was horrid and cross, and that she could not endure her.

"What shall I do with such children?" Miss Percival sighed to herself as she got into the carriage. "But what can one expect from Louis Brand's children?"

CHAPTER VI.

HIGHFIELD.

MISS PERCIVAL went down that afternoon to Highfield. Colonel Percival had become of late years entirely an invalid, and had fallen into that state in which the most minute trifles of his daily routine were of more importance than — I was going to say the greatest events of state, but that is really the case with all of us more or less; so it would be more to the point to say that these trifles were of more importance to him than matters that seriously affected the welfare of his family or his estate. I think that a disturbed night or a badly cooked dinner was of more consequence to him than the loss of half his fortune; and I am afraid that the loss of his valet would have been worse to him than that of his daughter Penelope herself, provided he could have escaped the business worries which her death would necessarily have entailed.

Of course in these circumstances the loss of a daughter whom he had not seen for sixteen years

was hardly likely to affect him very keenly, and it was not a subject of any apprehension to Miss Percival as to how he would take the news of his daughter's death, though her intention of having the two girls to live at Highfield would require to be put carefully before him, lest he should take alarm at this invasion, and worry himself into the idea that his comfort and quiet would be disturbed, which she had resolved should not happen.

She reached Highfield just in time to dress and go down to dinner. It was always pleasant to come back to Highfield, but now it seemed specially so ; whether it was that the memory of Purton Street rose up with its sordid contrast to bring into higher relief the comfort and dignity and quiet luxury of her surroundings, or whether, as we are all apt to do, she saw it in the light in which it was likely to impress new-comers, who could hardly have imagined such a place as Highfield, and to whom it must certainly come as a delight and surprise.

It was curious, and she did not in the least realize it, how much she was building on those two children's coming, even those children over whom she had sighed as such hopeless subjects to deal with — the children of the shrimps and monkey episodes ; Pen, with her persistently turned-away head

and her little clinched hand ; Louis Brand's children. Quite unconsciously to herself she was associating them with everything about the place, with the broad, shallow steps of the staircase, with the deep window-seat in the hall, with the old armor and antlers that adorned the walls, with the family portraits, where in one and another odd little resemblances peeped out to Louis Brand's children. She turned aside, even though the dinner-bell had rung, to open the door of the long-disused school-room, where every well-worn book on the shelves, or ink spot on the leather-covered table, recalled some incident of long ago, when there were two school-girls there, as silly and happy and idle as most school-girls, no doubt. She crossed the room and turned the old terrestrial globe, noting, with an eye to a future word with the housemaid, that the dust lay thick on the frame, and then caught herself up and turned away to hasten down to take her place opposite her father in the dining-room, where the wax candles on the table only dimly lighted up the darkness of the black oak panels and the portraits of Percivals of other ages, frowning or simpering down from the walls.

Miss Percival had resolved to put off telling her father of her sister's death till after dinner, and had prepared herself for leading away the conversation

if the old man should ask after her ; but she might have spared herself the trouble of such forethought, for Colonel Percival was quite absorbed in some delinquencies of the postman, which had just come to light, and which he talked of with persistent reiteration all through dinner, getting a little irritable at his daughter's indifference to what was to him the principal interest of the hour.

"Of course it's nothing to you," he was saying rather fretfully, when at last the dessert was on the table and the quick, light-footed servants withdrew and left the father and daughter alone, "of course it is nothing to you whether you get your letters regularly or no. A girl's letters — pshaw ! But my letters are of importance, and besides it is the principle of the thing, the least delay or irregularity ought to be shown up at once, or it leads to a demoralization of the whole system — a demoralization of the whole system," repeated the old man, with a satisfaction in the sound of the last words, which recalled to his mind old times, when he was chairman of Quarter's Sessions, and was rather proud of his well-turned sentences.

"Father," Miss Percival said, coming round from her place at the end of the table and drawing a chair to the old man's side, "you remember I told you how ill I found poor Theresa !"

"Yes, yes," he answered rather testily ; his ideas moved slowly, and he did not like an abrupt change of subject, and besides in old age, from various causes, there are so much fewer subjects of interest than you find in youth, and you have to be economical over them, and work one thoroughly dry before you embark on another ; and there was a good deal more to say about Jenkins' misdeeds. "I hope she's better. I have been very anxious about her. I could not close my eyes for five minutes the night after your first letter came. It was such a shock to me, and it ought to have been broken to me more gently. Dr. Perry says I can't bear a shock, it was only to-day he said so."

"I told you," Miss Percival went on, "that there was no hope of her recovery, but the end came sooner than I expected."

She thought he had not understood her meaning, for he was apparently engrossed in disentangling a knot in the silk cord by which his eyeglasses were attached, and she laid her hand on his arm and repeated rather louder, "She died, father dear, yesterday."

"Yes, yes. I heard what you said. I'm not deaf. I have many infirmities, but I am happy to say deafness is not one of them. Poor Theresa ! she was always a great trouble to us, your poor

mother felt it very acutely, she never got over it ; she was never the same afterwards. And now she's gone, and there are only you and I, Penelope, left."

"There are her children, father."

"Oh, yes, she had some children, I think you mentioned it. I suppose I ought to do something for them. I don't know what is expected of me."

"There are two girls, one of them — fifteen — is named Penelope after me, and the other is only six, and is named Theresa after her mother."

"No boys?"

"No, only the two girls."

"Well, what is one to do for them? Put them to school, or what?"

He knew by her manner that there was something coming, she was arranging the little group of wine-glasses at his side on the table, in various positions, in a way that might almost have been mistaken for nervousness if Miss Percival had been nervously inclined, and she made no answer to his last question.

"Well, what is one to do for them? Put them to school, or what? You don't want to have them here, I suppose?"

"Yes," she said quietly, "that is just what I do wish."

There was a fortunate interruption at this moment by the entrance of the coffee and Colonel Percival's man to wheel his chair into the library, where they sat in the evening when they were alone ; and he also brought in a note to Miss Percival, which required an answer, and she went away to write it, and before she came back she went into the bedroom that she and Theresa used to share when they were little girls. She had been advanced to a better room, but Theresa had kept this to the end of her home-life, and it had never been used much since, so that without any intention of keeping the room sacred, it remained much the same as she had left it. Miss Percival had no candle, but the moonlight through the window showed her the pictures on the walls and the knick-knacks on the mantelpiece, and the books in the little hanging bookshelf on the wall. She did not know how familiar Pen was already with that room ; how she knew the picture of " Dignity and Impudence " over the fireplace, and the china pug dog, and the remains of the little dessert service, in which childish feasts had been served. Miss Percival was not fanciful, no one had ever accused her of that, but as she stood in the moonlit room with all the old associations rising up thickly around her, she could almost have fancied that her sister was by her side again.

"Pen shall have this room," she said, "and Tre shall have the old night nursery."

She had never condescended to shortening the names into Pen and Tre before, even in her thoughts. She thought abbreviations vulgar, and had resolved that the silly shorts of Pen and Tre should be left behind in London, with much besides belonging to their early life. But somehow the influence of the moonlit room and the thought of the dead face softened some of the hard and fast lines she had been laying down for the future, and it seemed impossible to call the niece Theresa when the sister's presence was so vividly real.

When she came back to the library, she found that a fresh item of news about the postman had turned her father's thoughts back into their former channel.

"Tell me of my father," Theresa had said one day, "does he look much older? Does he still do this? Does he still like that?"

Penelope remembered the great eyes watching her face as these questions were asked, with the hungry look perhaps that Joseph may have worn in all the plenty and riches of Egypt, when he asked, "Is your father well? the old man of whom ye spake, is he yet alive?" And it hurt her to feel that there was no answering feeling, and it brought

before her more vividly than anything else had done the irretrievable loss of those sixteen years. He had been so fond of Theresa in those old times; she remembered feeling jealous of her and thinking she was the favorite, and was made more of than herself.

She recalled once when Theresa was ill the terrible anxiety Colonel Percival had shown about her, and the rejoicing over her recovery; and now her death did not seem to affect him in the smallest degree.

As she sat opposite the old man, dozing in his armchair, it seemed to her that she was the only real mourner for her sister. She did not give Louis Brand credit for anything but a theatrical, posturing sort of sentiment; and the children, as we have seen, had not impressed her with the depth of their feelings, and as for Sandy, she knew nothing about him. And so she fancied herself as standing virtually alone beside her sister's grave, a very solitary mourner; and from that her thoughts drifted on to her own funeral, and to the wonder of who would mourn for her? Not her father, even if he survived her, which did not seem likely. She felt that her loss would hardly cost him more than Theresa's, if his material comforts were not interfered with. She had many friends? Yes; but as she ran

through them in her mind, there was scarcely one she could imagine even shedding a tear if she heard that Penelope Percival was dead, or doing more than giving a sigh of very mitigated regret as she announced the fact to a sympathetic visitor. The servants who had been in her service for years, and whom she had treated with unfailing justice and courtesy, would wear mourning and go about with faces of the conventional length, and speak in subdued voices for a day or two, but as to any sincere heartache there was not one of them that she could expect it of; it was not in the bond. The village people too would gather to the church to see the burying, and feel a sort of pride in the show, and there might be a few sighs and shakes of the head, and even a tear here and there among the more lachrymose of the women, but it would be better not to inquire how much of such signs of mourning is sacred to memories of broth and flannel, and intensified by doubt about the future in these respects.

Miss Percival was not generally given to morbid reflections, but to-night they crowded thickly upon her, and for the first time in her life she seemed able to stand apart from herself, and to see what a very solitary, unloved person Miss Percival of Highfield was. Was she so unlovable? More than

one man had wished to marry her ; once she had been engaged for a short time, she might, as the saying is, have married well, but something had always intervened, and there was not strong enough feeling on her part to overcome obstacles or overlook objections. Was there anything repellent about her? The colonel was asleep in his chair opposite, and she got up softly, with a half smile at her own folly, and looked at herself in the round mirror in a heavy antique frame over the mantelpiece.

It was a gracious, pleasing face she saw there, the shaded lamp and the glowing firelight softened the sternness and lightened the hardness ; and the eyes had a gentle, pleading look that did more than shaded lamp or firelight glow ; she was pleading with herself against herself that she was not unlovely and unlovable.

The children should love her ; come what might she would win their love. This proud, independent Penelope Percival just then, in the sudden chill feeling of loneliness and lovelessness, felt a hunger for the love of those children of Louis Brand's, — those rough, ill-bred, shrimpy, little creatures, for whom she had felt a repugnance almost amounting to disgust only a few hours before. She was stretching out her hands to them across the gulf,

which had just revealed itself to her, as separating her from the love and sympathy of the rest of her kind, begging for just a drop of the water of their love to assuage the parching thirst of her nature.

She would win their love ; she would spare no pains to make their life happy to them ; they, at least, if no one else, should grieve for her and feel her loss a heart-breaking and terrible matter ; she was planning feverishly how she would endear herself to them as it were, laying traps for their affection, or seeking to bribe them out of it with all the lavish outlay imagination could suggest.

Miss Percival was certainly not herself that night, she was nervous and unhinged, and Colonel Percival was irritably conscious of something amiss with her, when he woke with a snort and found her sitting, with her work dropped into her lap, staring fixedly into the fire, which had sunk below its usual comfortable proportions.

“ Pshaw ! ” he said with a shiver, “ ring the bell for Jackson, I ’m chilled to the bone ! Sitting looking at the fire won’t keep it alight, and I had closed my eyes for a minute as I have had a lot of worry to-day — a lot of worry ! and the doctor said it was as much as my life was worth to be worried.”

Just for a moment he could not quite recall what had been the worries of the day, but they

soon came back, and naturally the one first that had most deeply impressed him.

“If a man can’t have his letters delivered punctually and regularly, a man, I say, who has business affairs of importance — Poor Theresa, too, yes, yes, poor Theresa! — Gently, Jackson, gently, I tell you. I’m not made of cast-iron to be knocked about in that way.”

The letters, in spite of the postman’s delinquencies, were delivered at the proper hour next morning, and several of them taken up on the tray that conveyed Miss Percival’s early cup of tea. She had not slept well, her mind had been feverishly working over the plans for the future, and the rearrangements that would be necessary; the redistribution of the household work; the new maid to wait on the two girls; the hours and rules that would be best for them; of other girls in the neighborhood who would be suitable friends for them. No one would have given Miss Percival credit for such castle-building, or have imagined for a moment that Louis Brand’s children could have been the foundation on which these airy fabrics were built up, but one of those letters on the silver salver shattered them at a blow.

It was directed in an unknown hand, one of those artificially original hands that are the fashion

nowadays, carefully bold, with a great deal of character in them, but not the character of the writer, because it is not natural. After all the copper-plate, conventional writing of our forefathers might have betrayed more traits of the writer's character to the delineator, who undertakes to hit off all your moral and intellectual qualities on receipt of six stamps, than much of the affected caligraphy of the present day.

Miss Percival knew at a glance who was the writer, though it was the first time she had seen her brother-in-law's writing, and though there was not the depth of black edge that she would have expected ; but with an odd sort of nervousness she opened her other letters first, and drank her tea before she opened this. She had a conviction that it was to ask for money, and, as she held the envelope in her hand, she told herself that this was no doubt the first of a series of such demands, and that it would be necessary to have a very clear rule laid down as to how much he was to have.

The letter was very short. There was no long-winded palaver at any rate.

DEAR MADAM, — I have arranged for the funeral of my wife at Monkton-on-Sea on Saturday next.

Allow me to thank you for your kind intentions as regards my children; but I do not think I need trouble

you to undertake their maintenance and education, seeing that they still have a father living in the person of

Your obedient servant,

LOUIS BRAND.

Kindly let me know if you propose to attend the funeral on Saturday.

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER'S GRAVE.

THERE is an operation that is forcibly but vulgarly described as cutting off your nose to spite your face, and Louis Brand, before the ink of that letter was dry, felt that he was being guilty of an act of that description, and he called 'Liza back just as she was starting to put it in the post, with half an idea of altering it so as at least to leave a loop-hole for possible reconciliation; and he even took it in his hand as if he were just going to reopen it, while 'Liza stood at the door tying her bonnet-strings, which she generally considered a superfluous elegance when merely going to the post.

But after a minute Mr. Brand tossed the letter back to her, saying, "There! it can go as it is," and it accordingly appeared, as we have seen, at Highfield with Miss Percival's early cup of tea.

It is very difficult to do Louis Brand justice about this action of his, and, for the matter of that, it is always very difficult to judge fairly of

others, and perhaps quite as much so of ourselves, motives are so inextricably mixed. There may be a tiny vein of the purest gold running through and lost sight of in a mass of utterly worthless rock, while, on the contrary, a flaw may run through what looks like a solid piece of precious metal.

It was not merely to gratify his feelings of resentment and indignation at the treatment he had received from his wife's family, nor from his wounded pride at what he called, and perhaps not untruly, the insolence of Miss Percival's proposal, though both of these were largely represented: he had really loved his wife, quite as much perhaps as dozens of unselfish, considerate, attentive husbands, who never give their wives one heartache, and who marry again as soon as a decent time has elapsed after their deaths. Louis Brand could no more have married again than he could have turned into a satisfactory, dependable individual, and his grief was as ill-regulated and undisciplined as the rest of his feelings. His sorrow was not however intensified by remorse, as many men's might have been in his situation. Looking back on his married life it seemed to him a day-dream of happiness and love and sympathy, and he lost sight of all the little daily

clouds and mists that had interrupted the sunshine of those days.

He had fixed on Monkton-on-Sea as the place where his wife should rest, not only because he would not have her admitted as it were by sufferance among the people who would not recognize her during her lifetime, but also because it seemed like giving her back altogether, losing her utterly, if she were laid away in the great, grim family vault, where there would be no room for him beside her. And Monkton-on-Sea had been the place where they had gone after their marriage, where they had spent some happy, sunshiny spring weeks, when the hope of speedy reconciliation with her family had made what seemed only a temporary estrangement easy enough to bear.

There was a sweet, sunny churchyard there, he remembered well, where they had sometimes sat, talking as happy people will of death and parting, as something so very far away and improbable that they can afford to look at it in a tender, poetical fashion, which can be cut short at any moment by the warm pressure of living hands and the look of loving eyes. He remembered how she had described to him then the Percival tombs in Highfield churchyard, and had said, "When we are very old, you and I, Louis, we will come and be buried

just here where we sit to-day, only you must let me go first, just a little time first, for I could not live a day without you."

What a child she was then ! But now she had gone first, and the words spoken in almost a tender jest should be carried out to the letter, and she should be laid where they stood that day in the spring sunshine, with the daffodils nodding their golden heads in the beds along the churchyard path, and a thrush singing a full-throated song from the lilac bushes, on which the buds were swelling almost visibly.

She had never spoken of her wishes during her last illness, indeed no word of parting had passed between them, and she had shown no yearning for her old home, nor eager delight at her sister's coming. As for the children, there was no doubt what their wishes would be as regards Highfield. Sandy had told him some of Pen's fireside confidences, though, with what he felt was the deepest treachery, he strongly advised Mr. Brand to weigh well the advantages offered to the children in being brought up under their grandfather's roof. Sandy was not much given to offering advice, though he was a very sympathetic listener, which is worth all the good advice in the world put together ; so perhaps he did not argue the matter

with Louis Brand as forcibly as a more experienced giver of advice might have done, and moreover perhaps he was half-hearted about it himself, and could not quite shake off the effect of Pen's pleading eyes and the feeling that, when once the children entered the gates of Highfield, they passed out of his life altogether; and that he should never again feel Pen's hands clasping his arm, and her sweet, little face looking up so confidently into his, or Tre's arms clinging round his neck, with her round, soft cheek pressed to his.

So when he came in that evening soon after that important letter had been despatched, and heard the decision that Louis Brand had arrived at, though he protested against the folly and selfishness of the step, and declared that the children were being sacrificed to his false pride — during which tirade, Louis Brand leaned back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and his eyebrows raised, whistling softly to himself — Sandy felt really, in the bottom of his heart, a little feeling of relief, and having satisfied his conscience by protesting, threw himself heartily into all the arrangements, and, I fancy, provided a good deal of the necessary funds for carrying them out.

Louis Brand had never talked so energetically or sensibly about the necessity of setting to work

and making a comfortable home for his little girls ; and Sandy half believed there must be something in it, and that the artist had taken a fresh start of industry, and wondered at such being the first result of losing the wife who, to Sandy's mind, might have inspired the most idle nature to boundless efforts, if not to actual genius ; and when his mind misgave him, he comforted himself with the feeling that, at any rate, he would be at hand to keep an eye on them, and they would not be altogether lost to him as would have been the case if they had gone to Highfield.

That Saturday was one of those lovely days that are sometimes granted to us in March, but very rarely, standing out in strong contrast with the days of blustering rough winds, or sullen rain, or gray ungenial gloom, or deceptive, steely sunshine, with the biting east wind to blemish its good deeds.

This was balmy and kindly and gentle, with little, dappled, soft clouds tossed about over the blue sky, and a tender, little breeze to waft the scent of violets, and the pleasant smell of fresh-turned earth, and the sound of bubbling springs, and the notes of birds ; it is only on such days that we recognize the silence and scentlessness and darkness of winter.

It was the very day for a funeral, full of hope

and the sense of a coming brightness ; it is easy enough to think of the Resurrection on such days ; and the words of the burial service will always be associated in Pen's mind with sunshine and a broad expanse of blue sparkling sea, which stretched out beyond the gray shoulder of the hill that shelters little Monkton Church from the north and east. She shed no tears, and once she looked up into Sandy's face and smiled, and he smiled back, but there were no hysterical manifestations of grief such as Aunt Penelope had feared though she was not there to see and keep them in check, and there were only Louis Brand and the two girls and Sandy, so they might have behaved as naturally or vulgarly or unconventionally as they liked, without any feeling of constraint.

When the service was over, Sandy took Pen and Tre to a farmhouse near, where a kind, bustling farmer's wife made much of them, and regaled them with milk and large slices of home-made bread and butter, and interested them both, and more especially Tre, to whom such things had hitherto been fabulous, or rather articles of faith, as mother had often described them, so they must really exist — in a family of newly hatched ducks with yellow plush bodies and button eyes, and absurd embryo wings, and little webbed feet.

A farm appeared to Tre as a very superior sort of Zoological Gardens, in which you were allowed to come to much more satisfactory terms with the animals, without the interference of troublesome keepers.

When Louis Brand and Sandy came in, they found Tre in perfect happiness, with her crape all covered up safely under a capacious apron of Mrs. Metcalfe's, sitting quite inside the big, open fireplace, with a flannel bundle in her arms containing a very interesting invalid, a young pig, the "barling" of a large family, who, being the weakest and less able to assert its rights, had been put upon and trampled by its more vigorous relations, and had been rescued and brought indoors for a little cossetting by the fire. She could hardly bear to give up the sufferer, and Mrs. Metcalfe was anxious to bestow it on her, but readily understood that it would be an awkward addition to their party for the Sunday, which was to be spent at Monkton, whatever it might be later on in Purton Street; and also that, considering they were going to walk down to Monkton, and it was a good four miles, even a barling might be somewhat of a burden to carry.

When they came out of the farm they found that mother's grave was filled in, and the mound

covered with moss and flowers, which made it less of a wrench to come away and leave her there. Sandy had been busy helping the old sexton when Pen and Tre were in the farm, and the grave looked a very pleasant resting-place in the level rays of the sun, that still rested lovingly on it, as the children knelt down and whispered their last good-night among the flowers, and then set off with father and Sandy up the steep hillside, with the gorse flowering bravely here and there on the broad, heathy margin of the road, mixed with the dull purple of last year's dead ling, and the remains of the gallant show of golden brake and crimson blackberry leaves that had weathered the winter's snows. The sun had dipped behind the hill before they reached the brow, but it left such a legacy of crimson glow, as might have glorified a far less beautiful landscape of undulating meadows and pine-clad hills and snug cottages, clustering round thatched farmhouses, each with a body-guard of stout ricks.

Pen had drawn her hand out of Sandy's, into which it had naturally found its way, as she turned away from the grave, and put it rather timidly under her father's arm; he looked so white and gaunt and hollow-eyed, and so very lonely, as if she and Sandy and little Tre might be miles away

from him, even though they were walking at his side. He kept looking away too with those great hungry dark eyes, with the same look in them as when he had turned at the lych gate to look back at the flower-covered grave, as if he could see it still, though his eyes were fixed on the steep road, and the hill-top purple against the crimson sky.

It was dark when they got into Monkton, Sandy carrying little Tre, who was quite worn out with the events of the day. There were lights shining from the windows of the quaint, little town, and a red lamp from the end of the small breakwater pier drew a moving, wavy line across the water, revealing the fact that the great darkness in front was the sea, which was confirmed by the soft lap and splash on the beach below, and the fresh smell of seaweed in the air.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY OF REST.

LOOKING back at the last chapter it seems to me that the geography of Monkton may puzzle the reader, and that I ought to explain that Monkton, where Mrs. Brand was laid, is, properly speaking, Up-Monkton, just a little scattered hamlet two miles from the sea, up a long coombe or valley ; while Monkton proper, or Monkton-on-Sea, lies on the seashore, not at the opening of the same valley, but over the shoulder of the next bluff or headland, over which the steep road from Up-Monkton leads, and then descends abruptly, almost precipitately, into the little, gray town, nestling round a little, gray church down on the beach, where the cliffs that rise so majestic and grim and uncompromising on either side, dip down as if on purpose to let the Monkton fishermen launch their boats.

In that part of the world if you mean Up-Monkton you point with your thumb indefinitely over your shoulder, without any precise notion of

its being situated north, south, east, or west of where you stand, the upward jerk is enough; whereas if you mean Monkton-on-Sea you point, still with the thumb, in a downward direction under your elbow.

It was very early in the morning that Sandy looked out of his little bedroom window in Beach Cottages. He had not slept much, perhaps the bed was not comfortable, perhaps his thoughts were worrying and anxious, but it was still dark when he opened his window and leaned out, though there was a brightening in the east, a soft, throbbing light that made the stars grow pale, and that, as it strengthened, flushed the sky and sea from east to west with rose-color, and turned a great bank of cloud into deep purple gloom.

Louis Brand used to say that Sandy had no appreciation of beauty, and Sandy never contested the point, and, I think, almost believed it; but still I do not think the beauty of this dawn was wasted on him. Beauty affects people so differently, some of us consciously notice it and dissect and compare it, while others imbibe it unconsciously, and are happier, holier, and nearer heaven for it. There are others, but these, I hope and believe, are few, who are utterly impervious to outside influences, and yet perhaps it would be better to hope there

are many such, seeing how many thousands live all their lives, or rather exist, in ugly and sordid surroundings.

Before Sandy lay the beautiful sweep of Monkton bay, which stretches away on either side till, at the extremities, the headlands mix with and melt into the clouds. It is only here and there that the cliffs relax and dip down to the beach as they do at Monkton, though, gray and uncompromising as they look, they cannot resist the inroads of the sea, that stretched so smiling and dimpling and innocent before Sandy that morning. Occasionally that sea comes dashing in in great, powerful, foaming waves, which tear down masses of the gray lias and undermine the cliffs, and scatter the beach below with fossil treasures of rare beauty and interest to enthusiastic youths with hammers, and ardent old maids in spectacles and mushroom hats, who can pronounce words of six syllables without turning a hair. These fossils are a harvest to the Monkton fishermen, who, without any knowledge of mineralogy, or wish to acquire it, or power of pronouncing breakjaw names, and guided only by the all-powerful instinct of money-getting, ferret out all sorts of curious objects, for the names of which I would refer you to the guide book to Monkton, under the heading of "Geology of the Neighborhood."

But Sandy gazed as ignorantly at the geological strata along the cliffs as you or I might have done, and noticed more how headland after headland came in sight, in the strengthening light, and how, when the sun showed its bright face over the horizon, the crimson of sky and shore was drowned in the golden sea of light that flooded the world.

The bedroom provided for Sandy was in the next house to that where Louis Brand and the children slept, as the few little lodging-houses on the beach at Monkton are by no means spacious, so that he could not tell if Pen and Tre were still asleep; and when, an hour later, he turned out on to the little parade, and looked up at Beach Cottage, the smallest of the little dolls' houses, and the farthest from the town, there was no sign of life or stirring about it, any more than in the other houses, which were still asleep with drawn blinds and closed doors.

Knowing by experience the soundness of the slumbers of lodging-house keepers, and their wrath at being awakened at unusual hours, he refrained from ringing the bell if there was one, which I rather doubt, so primitive is Monkton, but, instead, threw up a pebble at the window over the door of Beach Cottage. A minute afterwards the blind was pulled aside and a wild struggle ensued with

the window, which was speedily raised by another hand belonging to some one who kept discreetly in the background ; while with no regard to appearances, and the fact that a nightgown is not the usual style of costume for receiving morning callers, Tre's bright face and curly head leant out of the window, with two round arms stretched out to Sandy, wishing him good-morning and begging him to wait for her only a minute, she wanted to go and dig in the sand, and catch some dear little crabs, and pick up shells, and — What else she wanted was lost by her disappearance into the room, and the window being closed.

Tre's toilet that morning must have been a hasty affair, for Sandy had not been sitting for more than five minutes on the breakwater that runs out into the sea just in front of Beach Cottage, when a precipitate rush of small feet behind would have made him turn round, if an instinct had not told him that they were meant to be unheard, and that the first intimation of Tre's presence was to be the clasping of her arms round his neck as she stood on the breakwater behind him. And then there was no getting rid of the creature, whatever it was, that clung so tight, with thrills of young laughter and tickling of soft breath on the back of his neck, till he got up and ran down the breakwater and

jumped across to a piece of low rock, the brown sea-weedy top of which had just been left visible by the retreating tide, and pretended, with violent contortions and exclamations of great terror, to shake it off into the little, creamy waves that surrounded them, and then it allowed itself to be pulled round into view and to be revealed, as no old man of the mountains, or strange and terrible octopus, or sea-creature, but little Tre, rosy and laughing as her mother would have loved to see her.

“How heartless children are!” Aunt Penelope might have said, “and her mother only buried yesterday!” But I think that mother would have smiled.

Pen joined the party before very long, and, as she brought news that father was still asleep and that there were no signs of breakfast, there was no occasion to hurry back, and the three wandered on far along the beach, allured from one object of interest to another. There were green pools in the rocks with waving brown seaweed, among which pale and ghostly little crabs sidled, or dim, shadowy shrimps flitted over the stones at the bottom, stones that looked like gems of priceless worth till you reached them; slippery promontories covered with seaweed, with knobs that would

pop if you squeezed them, over which it was exciting and perilous to clamber, with the chance of suddenly slipping into depths on either side; a lobster pot left high and dry by the tide, near which, by a freak of the tide, an empty lobster tail was lying, which Tre maintained had been left behind by its owner when escaping from the trap, though, as the shell was scarlet, it might have seemed likely that the lobster in question had gone through other experiences between its capture and parting with its shell.

At one time Tre got infected with a geological mania, and had soon got her frock full of stones of considerable weight, and she could hardly be persuaded to leave one with an indistinct broken fossil at one end, which weighed half a hundredweight or so; but, before Sandy had committed himself by an offer to carry this substantial curiosity, father was descried in front of Beach Cottage, signalling to them to come back; and hunger and the prospect of breakfast drove geology out of Tre's head, and the lapful of stones was cast ruthlessly aside.

Looking back on that Sunday at Monkton it always seemed to Pen as her ideal of a Sabbath, as if all the world were resting, mother in her flower-covered grave, father sitting there on the breakwater

smoking his pipe and looking away across the seas, which seemed resting too, so softly did the little ripples fall on the beach, and sink back with a peaceful, little, murmuring sigh, "e'en in its very motion there was rest."

A fishing-boat anchored near the end of the pier was reflected on the placid surface, its little mast prolonged, in the reflection, to the proportions of that of a racing-yacht ; and farther off the sails of some small boats made quite a long line of white on the sea. The gulls seemed resting too, settling down on the water in groups, and idly rising and falling with its gentle motion as if the strong wings, that battle so bravely against wind and storm, were weary. Tre, in spite of her active beginning of the day, was tired, and sat quietly resting against Sandy's arm and digging little holes in the sand with his walking-stick ; while Pen herself, with that sort of exhaustion that is almost pleasant if one is left quite alone and can sit still and dream, leaned against the stone breakwater and thought of mother.

Life seemed so short just then, and the promised land so near, it hardly seemed worth while to take anxious thought for the morrow, and to wonder how she could manage the housekeeping, and if 'Liza would mind what she said. I wonder if the

Israelites stood and gazed like that into Canaan before the order came to turn back into the wilderness, to the wanderings hither and thither, to the pitching and striking of tents, to the dreary desert ways, to the manna-gathering, the light bread that their ungrateful souls loathed? Daily life, with its little anxieties and trivial occupations and pleasures, seems at such times very like the wilderness; but just for that day Pen could gaze into the land flowing with milk and honey, which seemed clearer than Portland Bill away there in the dim horizon.

When the little cracked bell rang out for morning prayer, it was father who first roused up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe and the sand from his coat. Pen had supposed that she and Tre would go to church, and perhaps Sandy, who had taken to church-going lately, since mother had not been able to go with them; but father had never gone with them before, and his going strengthened the feeling that everything was different, and that they were all nearer death and heaven; and all the service seemed a continuation of the burial service, and every psalm or verse in the Lessons to contain some allusion to mother, or recall some word or look of hers.

Perhaps with Louis Brand there was, quite

unconsciously, a little bit of the feeling that the country people have, with whom the Sunday after a funeral is a great occasion, when all the relations, including those who are dissenters and others who usually attend no place of worship, betake themselves to church in long hat-bands and all the pomp and panoply of woe, and are given the place of honor in the free seats, and expect an appropriate sermon, during which sniffs and shakes of the head, and prolonged and audible sighs mark any particularly forcible passage.

It was a sleepy, old church with high, narrow pews, and frowning galleries, and dusty monuments, and a clergyman to match in a chestnut wig; the singing was rough and unpretending, but had a certain honest ring and simple sweetness that echoed in after times in the memories of some that heard it, even through the rare beauty of cathedral choirs and exquisitely trained voices. The quaint, old rhymes of Tait and Brady lingered in Pen's mind, associated with the murmur of the sea close outside, and a shaft of dusty sunshine through the greenish glass of the window, striking on the corner of a hatchment, and on the head of a marble cherub on a tomb hard by.

“ In tender grass He makes me feed,
And gently there repose ;

Then leads me to cool shades and where
Refreshing water flows.
I pass the gloomy vale of death,
From fear and danger free,
For then His aiding rod and staff
Defend and comfort me."

Tre dropped asleep, leaning against Sandy's arm, during the long doctrinal sermon, and though Pen's eyes were raised with due propriety to the thick crimson fringe of the pulpit cushion, over which, from time to time, glimpses were afforded of a bit of the preacher's black gown, or one of his whiskers, I am afraid that she did not follow all the intricacies of his reasoning, but that her thoughts were away by the flower-covered grave, or in the Paradise of gentle repose to which that grave seemed the gate.

In the afternoon they were to have gone up to Monkton, but the beautiful morning had clouded over and a small persistent rain came on, and Sandy found that Monkton had very strict views as to keeping the Sabbath as regards the hire of any sort of conveyance, or making any exertion to get one ready, or even exercising their minds to think on the question.

It was a disappointment to the children, but Sandy, realizing the sadness of a wet churchyard and lowering clouds, and of half-faded flowers

washed and shattered by the rain, was not sorry that it was out of the question getting there, and that the children would carry away the memory of the grave with the sunset light resting on it, and the flowers still fresh and fragrant ; and Pen was fain to confess that she was still tired, and that a long walk, especially in the rain, was not very desirable, and was quite impossible for Tre, who yet would never have consented to stay behind if she had gone.

So they sat in the little bow-window of the sitting-room, and watched the scuds of rain sweeping across the sea, sometimes mixing up sea and sky into one gray misty mass, sometimes clearing off and showing an indigo, hard horizon against the sky. Father was asleep on the horsehair sofa behind, so Sandy and Pen and Tre could talk freely of mother, not in that impossible, unnatural way into which we fall in speaking of the dead, but as a living person, as of course she was, not changed by that simple episode in life, by that mere "passing from this room into the next" which we call death.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FAMILY CONSTELLATION.

“**A**T any rate I shall be close at hand to keep an eye on the children,” Sandy had told himself when he heard Louis Brand’s decisive refusal to let Pen and Tre go to Highfield; but it was not a fortnight after the funeral when a letter arrived which seemed likely to introduce an important change into his life, and at all events called him imperatively away from Purton Street for a week or more.

Sandy had so entirely fallen into being an adjunct of the Brand family that, certainly, Pen and Tre regarded him as their own special belonging, and I think I have fallen into so regarding him, and may have impressed the reader in the same way. But Sandy Maclaren had a distinct individuality of his own, and was a member of a family who, no doubt, on their side, regarded him merely as a rather far-off satellite of theirs, a sort of *Georgium Sidus*, or some still more remote member of the solar system, toiling round an enormous orbit,

getting the very smallest possible amount of light and heat from Phœbus Apollo, and not even within sight, by the naked eye, of the more favored planets, who bask in the countenance of the sun-god. It seems to me, who, as the reader will readily perceive, have not a deep knowledge of astronomy, and but a vague notion of the laws of gravity and centrifugal force, that it is somewhat strange that these poor, dull, painstaking, little planets do not go off and join some other system where more advantages are offered. In human solar systems I think they do, though the centres of such systems sometimes like to imagine that the far-off cousins and distant relations are still revolving round them, and getting all their warmth and illumination from them.

When Sandy Maclaren's mother died, which, as I think I have stated, was while he was yet a little boy, his father was out in China in a big tea-house at Shanghai. Though he had only enjoyed the society of his wife for about a quarter of the short time that their married life lasted, as her health would not allow of her remaining at Shanghai, or his income allow of his leaving it, he took the news of her death so deeply to heart, that he never came back to England, and his two little boys, Sandy and his elder brother Tom, were quartered

out among their relations and sent to school as soon as possible. They met with a great deal of kindness from one and another, but kindness of a desultory sort which in no way makes up for the very dullest and strictest of homes. They got a great deal of going to the theatre with the butler, and plenty of high feeding, and unlimited confectionery, and handsome tips, when they went back to school, when kind-hearted uncles and aunts felt qualms of conscience that the holidays had not been very amusing for the poor boys. Hampers of good things were sent to them, not on their birthdays (how could you expect uncles and aunts, however kind, to remember such trifles as school-boys' birthdays?), ordered wholesale and packed at Fortnum and Mason's, to the envy and admiration of other boys, who punctually on their birthdays received modest, little baskets, the contents of which had each its home history, from the pie that mother made with her very own hands, to the dusky, little cake sent with baby's love.

School-boys are rather difficult visitors sometimes, and Tom and Sandy Maclaren, good, honest, simple-minded creatures as they were, were not favorable specimens of the genus, though I dare say, if they had had a mother to admire them and make much of them, and a home where they

could feel entirely at their ease, their awkwardness would not have been so apparent. They were big, raw-boned creatures, who grew outrageously fast, and always arrived from school with two or three inches of wrist and ankle showing at the end of much dilapidated sleeves and trousers; and they did not seem even to be able to estimate the length of their members accurately themselves, for they were always knocking things over and kicking and trampling about; and their mental ungainliness was almost as bad, and there was no knowing what awkward or inconveniently truthful remark they might make next.

I suppose hobbledehoyishness is a necessary malady of youth, though some boys get through it quickly, and take the disease so lightly, that they are not intolerable to themselves or their friends, to any perceptible extent; but Tom and Sandy took the complaint in its most violent form, as they had done all the infantile maladies— whooping-cough, measles, scarlatina, and mumps generally; also managing to have them at the most inconvenient times to themselves and other people, before an examination, or during the preparations for a family gathering or children's party, so that their Aunt Isabel used to say that she never sent out invitations during the holidays without

calculating how many infectious maladies still remained within the capability of those unlucky boys. But luckily hobbledehoy awkwardness is not infectious, or else Tom and Sandy might have dealt destruction to all the elegance and grace they came in contact with for many years, for Sandy could not be said to have lost all the symptoms even when my story begins, when he was thirty-five years of age, and might have been expected to have left such weaknesses nearly twenty years behind him.

When they left school Tom went out to join his father in Shanghai, a berth having been offered him in the same house ; and Sandy dropped into a situation in a big mercantile house in London, an arrangement which his relations inwardly groaned over, as entailing much painful exercise of hospitality on their parts, not limited to Christmas and Midsummer holidays, but scattered broadcast over the whole year, and not allowing of being helped off by tips or confectionery, or deputed to the butler.

But things often turn out better than we expect, and the very *gaucherie* that made Sandy such a very awkward guest, made him also a very unwilling one, so that consciences could be safely salved by writing dozens of affectionate invitations, full of

playful scolding for never going near them, and kindly imperious commands to report himself without delay, without any risk of his availing himself of them too frequently. And as time passed on, he somehow fell out of sight altogether, and consciences ceased to prick, so did not require salving, and Jupiter and Venus rolled comfortably round their easy little orbits with hardly a thought for poor hobbledehoy Georgium Sidus out there in the dark.

And meanwhile, as I have said, this poor Georgium Sidus had found another constellation when he was very much nearer the sun; in fact Pen and Tre sometimes thought he was the sun itself, round which they revolved, for they associated all the brightness and cheerfulness of their lives with him.

Tom had a different experience of life. He actually got engaged on the voyage out, being then only eighteen, and quite as intensely hobbledehoyish as Sandy. I do not know how it happened, but on a sea-voyage all sorts of extraordinary phenomena occur, and I am inclined to think that Mrs. Tom was a few years older than her husband, and was sensible enough to see what a good fellow he was in spite of his large red ears, and outrageous blushes and unmanageable hands; but I

really do not know much about her, for she never came back to England, and died six months before my story begins, shortly before Sandy's father went to rejoin his wife.

The days for making large fortunes in China are long since past, as every one connected with China trade takes pains to inform you, especially if you happen to have sons that you are anxious to start in life ; but, for the matter of that, the same is curiously enough the case in all other professions or branches of industry at home and abroad, and each person particularly depreciates the chances of success in his own special department, and hints that any other would be better. Be this as it may, when Sandy's father died, he left behind him a tidy, little fortune to his two sons, leaving the most to Tom, as being the eldest and having a wife and son. And as Tom himself had not done badly during his twenty years in China, the idea came into his head that there was no reason for further exertions, and that he might as well come home and settle in England and bring up his son as a country gentleman. He was not a man to act hastily or to talk much beforehand of what he was going to do, so it took all the community at Shanghai by surprise when they heard that Tom Maclaren and his boy were leaving for England ;

and it took Sandy still more by surprise when a letter from Tom announced his arrival by the next boat, and requested Sandy to come and meet him at Brindisi. And as the letter came, as I have said, just a fortnight after Mrs. Brand's funeral, and when he specially wanted to be near the children, the surprise was not altogether one of unmixed pleasure.

A brother in China is a different thing to a brother in England, and your duties to him are of a different character, and more varied than those to the brother in China, for whom you can do little more than write newsy letters at regular intervals, and occasionally execute commissions carefully and patiently, and endure with resignation the ingratitude and discontent that await your best efforts in this direction. But a brother in England may demand a good deal more than this; and as the very first call on his fraternal duty was to start forthwith for Brindisi, Sandy gloomily anticipated that the like might easily happen in the future, and that he would no longer be free to come and go as he liked; in fact he suddenly felt himself pulled back into the family constellation, and he found himself looking ruefully at his dress-coat, which was creased and crumpled in a manner terrible to behold, and of an antiquated cut

that betrayed how many years ago it had left the tailor's hands ; with a dreadful vision floating before his eyes of long dinner-parties and evenings of insupportable boredom, endured in the service of that autocrat, Society. The only consolation in the prospect was that there were no womenfolks to deal with, for Sandy fancied himself a woman-hater, never counting into the abhorred sex Mrs. Brand, who was more than half an angel, or Pen, or Tre, who were children, or indeed any other feminine creature who was kind to him or helpless ; so that the exceptions were likely to multiply indefinitely with all the women Sandy was brought into contact with ; for if you look round with as little discernment and as simple a faith as Sandy possessed, on all the women you know, and pick out all the kind and helpless ones, there would not be very many left to represent the heartless, worldly, little-minded, capricious creature that Sandy called woman in the abstract.

Unless those twenty years had changed Tom to an altogether different character, he was not likely to be devoted to society, and as to the child — why ! by Jove ! he was not a child, he must be sixteen or seventeen, nearly as old, in fact, as Tom when they parted on the deck of the steamer at Southampton and thought themselves quite men ;

and Sandy, who had unconsciously been thinking of pantomimes and the Crystal Palace, and planning various amusements suitable to a school-boy of ten or eleven, suddenly realized that this young Tom would be a man, at any rate in his own estimation.

It would be, Sandy thought, like getting back the same Tom who left him twenty years ago, and another who might be a bit changed and twenty years older.

CHAPTER X.

ONLY FOR A FORTNIGHT.

AFFAIRS at Purton Street were all going smoothly. Mr. Brand was working with an industry surprising to see, rising early, sitting up late, never to be seen without a palette on his thumb and many smears of paint on the velvet coat. Sandy felt a little bit distrustful of this ardor, which seemed too spasmodic to last; and he never went into No. 37, or opened the studio door, without a presentiment that a reaction might have set in, and that he would find Louis Brand stretched at full length on the divan by the studio fire, with his heels considerably higher than his head, and a newspaper in his hand, and his palette and brushes tossed into a corner, and his picture turned with its face to the wall.

But, at any rate, so far his fears had not been realized, and when he hinted the advisability of moderation in work, as less likely to lead to exhaustion of energy, Louis Brand looked reproachfully at him, and said something about his mother-

less girls supplying a stimulus that could never fail in its effect ; and Sandy was silent, only wondering in himself that the sweet mother's face had not been the same stimulus all the past years when Louis Brand had been idle.

Pen too was proving herself a most capable little housekeeper, and 'Liza was everything that could be wished, and rapidly acquiring the airs of an old and valued servant. There were, of course, occasional little rubs, where 'Liza did not show the deference that sensitive young mistresses are apt to expect, and exercised her private judgment too freely on such matters as the quantities of meat to be ordered, or the sort of pudding that was to appear at dinner. Sandy was always very sympathetic, but, being a man, he could not quite enter into the pangs that these trifles inflicted on Pen's dignity, and he was also inclined to take a broader view of housekeeping expenses, and to feel that tears were wasted over a greasy butcher's book when the weekly amount came to a few more pence than was expected ; and to think that if people ate more of one thing, they were likely to eat less of another, which is a very difficult fact for young housekeepers to grasp.

Sandy used to declare that he could reckon the amount of the weekly bills by the lines on Pen's

forehead, as she drew her eyebrows together in an anxious, little frown ; and he carried on the joke so far, that Tre actually grew to believe it was a fact, and to fancy she could make out figures on Pen's forehead under the rings of hair that strayed over it as if to protest that she was nothing more than a curly-headed child still, and not a sober, anxious woman, with all the cares of housekeeping and responsibility on her shoulders.

Sandy took all sorts of precautions on the children's account for the fortnight that he should be away ; it was to be a fortnight at the very outside, ten days, or even a week perhaps, would see him back again, and not much harm could happen in that time. He laid in what seemed to Pen a magnificent store of small additions to the commissariat department, cakes and biscuits, chocolate and potted meats ; and he would dearly have liked to have left a small sum of money to help out the weekly allowance, but he had a vivid remembrance of Mrs. Brand's face one day when the barrenness of the land had become very conspicuous, and Sandy's hand, without his thinking of it, had found its way to his pocket. The color had rushed into her sweet, pale face, and there had been a silent, eloquent deprecation in her eyes and hands, that needed no words to drive it home to his very

heart. Even presents in kind must be kept within certain limits — limits that were tacitly understood between them, though Mrs. Brand had none of that want of generosity which is shown even more distinctly by the dislike of receiving than by grudging in giving. And now she was gone the same feeling remained with Sandy, strengthened by the conviction that it was better for Louis Brand to feel the responsibility on his shoulders, especially as it seemed to inspire him with such unusual activity, though sometimes it caused Sandy quite acute pain to resist producing a coin out of his pocket, that might have cleared away the lines from Pen's forehead and set everything straight.

He gave 'Liza a good talking to before he went away; and I strongly suspect he gave her something besides a talking to, as people are not apt to manifest enthusiasm for the givers of mere words, or to talk of "'an'some is as 'an'some does," and "parties as is perfick gentlemen," when alluding to them.

"I shall be back in a fortnight," Sandy said — at least those, I think, were his words, for Tre was clinging round his neck and his voice had a muffled sound occasionally — "but if you want me — which, of course, you won't — or if anything happens — and why should it? — send round to my

lodgings, and Mrs. Jones will know how to get at me, and when I come home — when I come home ” — and actually the great stupid Scotchman’s voice shook and trembled as if home were something tender and beautiful to him, and not shabby, cheap lodgings in Dalston, hard by Purton Street, and two little motherless girls — “when I come home it will be warm weather, and we will go out for a long, long day in the country, and catch butterflies, eh, little Tre? ”

It was only to Tre he talked ; with Tre that he made plans of what they would do on his return ; with Tre that he arranged sundry little matters of business, such as the halfpenny every other day to be given to a crossing-sweeper in whom they were mutually interested ; but he was looking at Pen all the time — Pen with one of father’s socks drawn over her hand and a large darning-needle going backwards and forwards laboriously, if not very scientifically, looking so small and so very childish, in spite of, or rather in consequence of, the big armchair in which she sat, and the overflowing work-basket, and the heap of tradesmen’s books, and the bunch of keys.

She was too busy with her darning to look up, or perhaps she could not quite trust her eyes to keep as steady and composed as befits the head

of a household, and to hide the bitter feeling of loneliness that was filling her heart, at the prospect of even that fortnight without Sandy. It seemed like another parting from mother, as if she and the flower-covered grave and the sunny funeral were farther off now that she would have no one but Tre to talk to about them; it was a long day's march into the wilderness, away from the Promised Land, that day that Sandy went.

It was a relief when the parting was over and Sandy had gone off running, pretending he should be late for the train, and leaving Pen engaged in comforting Tre, whose grief was of a loud and demonstrative character, and whose age permitted of her feelings being expressed without any attempt at self-restraint, lying face downwards on the hearth-rug and kicking in answer to well-meant attempts at consolation. What a tremendous relief it would be in after years, sometimes if we might do this—roar for the very disquietness of our heart, and kick out right and left recklessly, without regard for appearances or the shins of our sympathizing friends, whose words sometimes give us such exquisite pain.

“It will only be for a fortnight at the very outside,” Sandy kept saying to himself. “It *shall*

be only a fortnight at the outside. Even if Tom and the boy want to loiter about on the way, I am not obliged to stay with them. I *will* be back in a fortnight ! What can prevent ? ”

And perhaps it was the rattle and noise of the Strand, as his hansom clattered into Charing Cross Station, that prevented his hearing the answer to this question of the future ; or perhaps the future mercifully keeps its counsel and is silent when we question it.

“ What can prevent ? ”

“ Circumstances.”

He had found no difficulty in making arrangements for this fortnight’s leave of absence from his office. Indeed the senior partner, with what Sandy felt to be quite officious good-nature, had suggested a longer holiday, and had treated the assurances that Sandy would be back punctually at the end of a fortnight in a light and airy way, as if it were of no consequence ; instead of insisting on his return at a given date, which would have been a convenience for quotation to Tom in case of a wish for delay. Sandy was in high esteem with his chiefs ; the other clerks enviously attributed it to the fact that it was known that Maclaren had plenty of private means, and did not care about keeping his situation at all, and would resign

it any day if it interfered with his plans. They used to say that Maclaren might do pretty much as he liked, and do things that would have cost the other clerks their situations, which situations meant to them their bread and butter, and with some of them the bread and butter of a wife and a couple of babies, which is not bread and butter that can be lightly dispensed with.

It certainly is a remarkable fact that what is of little value to a person is not likely to be lost, a truth which each one can illustrate from his own experience, remembering how the empty purse, or broken pen-knife, or pocket-handkerchief with a hole in it, or cracked teacup sticks by you and turns up in the most extraordinary manner, through all sorts of changes and chances; while the well-lined *porte-monnaie*, or sharp blade, handkerchief from a new and expensive set, or Dresden cup, comes to grief or disappears in a manner little short of miraculous. And it is the same, if you come to think of it, with other possessions of ours — our dignity, our reputation, our health, our life, the less one thinks of them the less danger we seem to run of losing them.

So perhaps the other clerks were right, and the amiability of the chiefs to Sandy was owing to the fact that he did not care a snap if they were amia-

ble or not, and not to be attributed in any way to eighteen years and more steady service and punctuality, and general, unobtrusive capability of doing work, which are by no means invariable characteristics of the genus clerk.

CHAPTER XI.

COMING BACK.

IT was circumstances that prevented Sandy from finding his way back to London and to Purton Street, as he had firmly and confidently intended and expected, at the end of a fortnight. Circumstances are stubborn things ; you hear, to be sure, of people rising superior to them ; but I think it is really the circumstances that raise the hero, just as they press another down, without any apparent weakness or fault of his own. Circumstances are against some people all through life, standing in the way of all their cherished plans and hopes and ambitions ; and some we speak of as the sport of circumstances, as they seem to be tossed up and down, hither and thither, like driftwood on a stormy sea. We are apt to consider circumstances as cold, hard, unresponsive things, often pitiless and relentless, against which we fling ourselves in useless vain struggles with the inevitable ; to which we must needs submit with bitter, grudging acquiescence. We cannot always see, any more than

Balaam could, the angel of the Lord standing in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side and a wall on that side, or regard circumstances as David did — “The hills stand about Jerusalem ; even so standeth the Lord round about his people.”

The circumstances which prevented Sandy from coming back to England at the time fixed were first of all the breaking down of the engines in the steamer on which Tom and his son were coming up the Red Sea, something very trifling, part of the gear overheated, or a defective bolt in that mysterious region where bright steel elbows work, and wheels turn, and darkened faces look up with a glow on them from the furnaces, and there is a throbbing and quivering of hot air, and a pervading smell of oil. So Sandy found a telegram awaiting him at Brindisi, to say that they should have to stop at Suez or Port Said for the next boat, which would be in a week's time ; and there was nothing for it but to wait, which Sandy did in much discontent and unwillingness and heat, and many flies and mosquitoes in a big barren hotel, where they were used to people coming and going, and did not at all lay themselves out to make the place delightful to people who stayed longer.

There were a few fellow-sufferers, who were also

awaiting the arrival of the steamer, but Sandy was in no mood to be sociable or even sympathetic, and he only exchanged uninterested glances from over the elderly English newspaper which he held continually before his eyes, though he must have had its contents pretty well by heart.

No doubt casual observers set him down as quite a typical English tourist, as he sat at the *table d'hôte* stiff and unsociable, and ate his dinner in solemn silence, except when he ordered anything of the polyglot waiter, in very distinct English, looking hard and distrustfully at the dishes handed to him, as if they might contain unholy ingredients that would stink in the nostrils of British subjects.

It would have surprised these lookers-on if they could have beheld the transformation that would have been effected if the chairs on either side of him had been occupied by Pen and Tre; and I think Sandy would have been quite as much surprised himself to find what a thoroughly amusing place dirty, little Brindisi had become all of a sudden if he could have looked at it through the medium of Tre's young eyes.

He could not speak a word of Italian, and his only experience of foreigners were the decidedly shady ones he occasionally came across in the

City, or in the artistic society affected by Louis Brand. He had a suspicious feeling that all the picturesque groups and graceful postures, the "little bits" as Louis Brand would have called them, that he saw at every turn in his aimless wanderings about the narrow, dirty, little streets of the town, and on the quays, were got up for effect, and had something stagey and unreal about them, like a scene in an opera, or the arrangement of models for an artist. The groups of chattering women in the market with their gay-colored skirts and handkerchiefs and bright eyes, the bronzed men, stretched asleep in the sun in graceful attitudes of perfect repose — an utter *abandon* of laziness such as is never attained by the most indolent of Englishmen — the lizards, darting hither and thither on the stones, on which the maiden-hair fern grew in every nook, the clear outlines, the lovely broad shadows, even the unclouded blue sky up above the solemn gray olive-trees, and the broad, sunny stretch of the azure Mediterranean, this unappreciative, sulky Englishman looked at merely as he would at a sufficiently well-painted drop-scene, which is down a trifle too long and retards the progress of the serious business of the piece.

And at the end of that week at Brindisi, another telegram came to say that young Tom had fallen

ill, and that they were at Port Said, and that Sandy must come on by the first boat. And at Port Said young Tom nearly ended his journey for good and all, and lay for weeks so near this life's terminus, that neither Sandy nor old Tom could spare many thoughts for anything else. They met over the lad's sick-bed as if they had never parted. I think the first words Tom said to Sandy were "Hollo, just hand me that cup;" and Sandy to Tom, "He wants another pillow;" and I am sure if during these first few days Sandy had been asked if Tom had altered, he could not have told you; and it only dawned on him after some time that his brother was bald, a fact that was patent to the most superficial observer.

Their meeting was very different to that between Mrs. Brand and her sister, though the separation had been longer; but oceans and continents, mountains and rivers, are nothing compared to silence and estrangement, to separate hearts that may even be beating side by side.

If young Tom had died, old Tom would have gone straight back to China. He was wrapped up in the lad, and if death's chill hand had stripped that wrap off him, and left him cold and shivering, just Tom Maclaren without wife or boy, he would

have had no heart to clothe himself with fresh interests, but would have sunk into old age at a time of life when to many men life is only just beginning.

But young Tom got better, not well all at once, of course, after so serious an attack ; and it was a very scarecrow young Tom that his father and Sandy brought back by slow stages, very helpless and dependent, given to sudden and unaccountable relapses, and clinging to Sandy as much as he did to his father. Whenever there was a talk of Sandy leaving them and going on alone to England, there was always a bad night or a rise in temperature, which brought old Tom anxious and apologetic to Sandy's bedroom, where, hesitatingly and dubiously (for Sandy had grown ridiculously fond of this long, large-eyed, young Tom, and was sorely torn in his mind), he was beginning to pack his portmanteau and let his thoughts fix themselves on Purton Street, and his departure had to be postponed.

He had heard two or three times from Louis Brand during the first fortnight of his absence ; and had received two little letters from Pen, which he read and re-read, trying to make out meanings between the lines of stiff, unformed writing and stiff, unformed expressions. They were such very

childish letters, it was quite a surprise to Sandy, remembering how in many ways she had the manners of a grown-up girl; but on reflection he guessed what was indeed the fact, that Pen had never written a letter in her life before, and that, though it was not a case of squaring her elbows and leaning her cheek on one arm and putting her tongue out, as her sisters in a lower rank might have done, still writing the letters was no less a work of great mental difficulty, and took a length of time that would appear almost incredible to most school-girls of her age, who carry on a voluminous correspondence with the greatest facility. She had never been separated from her mother till death did them part, so she had never had that best of educations in the art of letter-writing, correspondence with a mother; nor had she indeed a single written word of love of her mother's to read over and treasure. Neither had she ever written to her father; for when he was away from home, her mother had always written to him long, closely written sheets, too full of her love for him, and of praises of Pen, and of all the comfort she and little Tre were to her in his absence for the girl ever to get a sight of them. So she had no models to go by; and when she sat down with her heart full of all she had to tell Sandy, she found that she

had not the pen of a ready writer, and that the thoughts froze on her pen into dull, little, meaningless phrases, about father being well, and Tre well, and that she hoped Sandy was well, and was enjoying himself, and was coming home soon. She did not even quite know how to begin her letter; she had always called him Sandy, but somehow it looked rude and familiar in black and white, and she tried once on the blotting-paper how "Dear Mr. Maclaren" would look, and found it was impossible.

The ending was simplified by Tre, who desired to send kisses to Sandy, as 'Liza had shown her the best way to transmit those articles by post in the form of a flight of little crosses, which filled up all the space remaining.

After these two letters he did not hear again, though he wrote two or three times; but letter-writing did not come easy to Sandy either, and day after day he hoped to be able to write and fix the day for his return; and sometimes he thought that his return was so near that it was hardly worth writing, and that he might say all he had to say much more comfortably in the armchair at Purton Street, with Tre on his knee and Pen on the little stool looking up at him.

Two months actually slipped away in young

Tom's illness and relapses ; and when at last he was really better and was established in an hotel at Grindelwald, palpably getting stronger every day, and being made a great pet of by the energetic young ladies with nailed boots and alpenstocks, who abounded, so that Sandy felt he could well be dispensed with ; and when even Sandy's portman-teau was packed, and his place engaged on the omnibus to take him down to Interlaken, *en route* for Purton Street, a fresh circumstance quietly rolled in the way, and postponed his return for another two months.

This circumstance was none other than Sandy's own illness — Sandy who had never known a day's illness in his life, except those childish maladies in which, as I have said, he and Tom always indulged at the most inopportune moments — he, who had never had to consider fatigue, or cold, or east wind, or wet clothes or unaired sheets in any connection with himself or his health, now was seized with a shivering fit, as he and Tom sat smoking in the veranda of the hotel ; and, after vainly trying to prevent his teeth involuntarily performing the part of castanets, was obliged to confess that he was seedy, and that he had better turn in early.

And next morning, after a night that seemed as

long as the whole of his life put together, and after superhuman efforts to get into his clothes, like a reasonable human being, and walk across the room, the floor of which seemed rising and falling before his bewildered eyes, he was obliged to confess that he did not feel much like travelling twenty-four hours on end, and that he must give it up for a day or two.

Which day or two spread out into a month or two, so that it was nearly the end of August when he found himself turning the well-known corner into Purton Street, round which he had run in his pretended hurry to catch the train four months before in April.

He was rather a gaunter edition of the Sandy who went away, and his clothes, which were never of very fashionable cut, looked looser and less well-fitting even than usual. He had found it difficult even now to get away from the two Toms who had taken to tyrannize over him during his illness, and to treat him, as he protested, as if he were unable to take care of himself, and were either an inexperienced child or a decrepit, doddering, old idiot. So young Tom was hardly to be persuaded to let this helpless individual go on to London while he and his father remained at Folkestone. Where was the hurry? He would be roasted

alive ! There would not be a soul there at that time of year.

Young Tom talked as people so often talk, as if London in August were a howling wilderness with grass growing in the streets and wild beasts roaming about the deserted thoroughfares. Perhaps he had more excuse for talking in this way than most of us have, having only lately come within a thousand miles of the great metropolis, and only judging from hearsay ; but it is very curious how we, who ought to and do know better, persistently carry on this fable. It is true perhaps that in the park, or in the more fashionable streets and squares, and at the clubs, a difference may be seen ; a good deal of cleaning and painting is going on, the shutters are closed in many of the houses, and shady women in bonnets have taken the place of the gorgeous flunkeys. But outside these fashionable regions (and what a small part of London they form after all !) it would be difficult to tell it was not the season still, from the unabated throng of vehicles, with a fair sprinkling of carriages and pairs, from the shops, where business seems going on as merrily as ever, with the usual crowd of ladies at the counters, and the weary shopmen seeking to satisfy their never-ending wants. It is as difficult for nervous, old ladies to cross at Regent Circus ;

there is quite as much employment for the policeman in rescuing them from the horses' feet ; and as you pass eastward the difference is even less apparent ; the tide of business seems to rise as high in the city, there is as much noise and bustle and rush ; there are as many anxious, engrossed faces hurrying to and fro, as though there were no such things as broad harvest fields and breezy moors, or stretches of sunny sea, or leafy woods full of quiet whispers and soft shade. Still eastward, or rather northeast, in Dalston, times and seasons make little difference in the monotonous dulness, though perhaps August may be a trifle more so ; there is a parched, dusty look about everything, bits of paper appear on the scene and accumulate in corners, and, when a sultry, little breeze springs up, whirl and frisk about the pavements ; children swarm in all the side streets, showing, I suppose, that it is the Board School holidays ; and in less respectable streets than Purton Street, swings are established across door-steps, and hop-scotch diagrams are chalked out on the pavement. But Purton Street being more dignified had not descended to such practices ; and when Sandy turned the corner that August evening, there was no one to be seen in the length and breadth of the shabby, little street but a mangy-looking cat, slinking along with that

abject want of dignity and self-respect that only cats can sink to. Purton Street had never struck Sandy before as being so dreary and mean. Perhaps it was in contrast with the Swiss mountains, the fair, white Jungfrau flushed, as he had seen it only three evenings before, with the sunset, and the great Eiger, with its noble outline. But after all a palace might have looked mean after such grand masterpieces of the great Builder, and how much more little, dingy Purton Street, with its sooty bricks, from which the mortar was crumbling away, and its grimy paint and blistered doors.

Sandy had gone first of all to his own lodgings, and had found changes there to account for his having had no letters forwarded to him for some time past. Mrs. Jones had fallen ill, and a niece had come to nurse her, who, ultimately, had been left in charge, while Mrs. Jones had gone off for change of air to a brother "as lives over Southend way and keeps a teagarding with little harbors and a founting as plays beautiful, and tea and shrimps at ninepence a 'ead."

The niece was garrulous, and poured forth a flood of information as Sandy stood in the little sitting-room, turning over the letters on the mantelpiece, "which Mrs. Jones lef' word was not to be meddled with were it ever so, knowing as 'ow you

was that particler." Bills and circulars most of them, but two of them bore Pen's writing, and one of these bore a post-mark of not many days before. Well, at any rate she was living, for a dread had come into Sandy's heart that the long silence might mean the great silence; and if he, strong man as he was, had been ill and near death, why not that little, delicate, fragile girl?

He did not open the letters, but put them in his pocket, he could not read them while that woman was clacking away in his ears; and besides, he could reach Purton Street in two minutes and hear and see for himself a million times better than the most elaborate and exhaustive letter could possibly tell him. So he interrupted the niece in a prolonged explanation of how the lamp-glass got broken, and went off to No. 37.

As he approached it, he heard the somewhat tremulous strains of a concertina ascending from the open kitchen window, and stopped to listen, with a smile, wondering if 'Liza had added this to her other accomplishments during his absence.

"Hold the Fort" was the tune, played in rather a jerky and laborious manner, and, at the end, Sandy heard Tre's voice — and it sounded very small and clear and soft — say, "Mr. Mangles, when I'm better will you teach me to play a tune? Pen

says little girls always learn to play the piano. Mother did when she was a much littler girl than me. I'd like to learn to play just one little tune because, don't you know? I think in heaven peoples have to play a good deal, and it would be so bad not to be able to play one bit. I asked Pen how it would be for poor, little girls that could n't play and had never been taught, but she did n't seem to know about it; and I've been thinking, Mr. Mangles, that they could n't be angry, could they? if it was n't no fault of the little girls, and that perhaps there might be a sort of a barrel organ — no, not the one with the monkey," a shade of regret came into the voice here, "just to begin with, and the angels would teach them by and by."

And a gruff voice answered, "Ay, there's no knowing how things'll turn out, but I'll learn you, my pretty, as many toons as yer like if I'm here long enough, bless yer!"

Sandy's smile at the thought of 'Liza's new accomplishment had died away with Tre's first words. "Mr. Mangles, when I'm better —" Who was this Mr. Mangles who was established in the front kitchen? some friend of 'Liza's?

Sandy's exhortations to that young woman before he went away must have had very little effect if a

male friend or relative could be making himself at home in this way ! “ When I ’m better — ” there was no doubt the voice was weak and languid that spoke the words, very different from the voice that had chattered and laughed on the beach at Monkton, as they jumped from rock to rock ; and the words gave the impression of heaven and the angels seeming very near to the child, without the bright interval of happy life that used in former talks with Sandy to lie between her and that other world.

A step nearer brought him in view of the kitchen window, though the two within were too much occupied to notice him. The areas in Purton Street are narrow, and not furnished with area steps or even a ladder, and there are bars in front of the kitchen windows which seem scarcely necessary when there can be but little temptation to burglars in such houses. The window was pushed up as high as possible, and close to it lay Tre on an improvised sofa of chairs and pillows, a very shadow of the Tre Sandy had left sobbing on the hearth-rug. There was a pot of rather spidery musk on the window-sill outside, and, as Tre talked, one little hand was playing with the leaves, sending up to Sandy’s nostrils the sweet, spicy fragrance which in after years always recalled to

his mind that coming back, and the little, wasted hand playing with the yellowish leaves, and the outline of the wan, white cheek turned on the pillow towards the old man, who sat beside her, without his coat, and with the concertina resting on his knees while he took a prolonged pinch of snuff, an operation watched by Tre with rapt attention.

Not an attractive-looking old man this supposed relation of 'Liza's; bald, with gray eyebrows nearly meeting and tufted, so that Tre used to wonder the ends did not get into the small gray eyes that looked out from under the penthouse.

There were lines all over the face, accentuated by the snuff which lodged in all convenient nooks and crannies. There was a good deal of snuffy gray whisker and growth under the chin, and a tuft in the middle of the chin, which seemed to be a particularly convenient resting-place for snuff, and which wagged up and down when he played the concertina, and, in difficult passages, quivered in a manner interesting to behold. Of course these details of his appearance were not taken in at the first glance by Sandy, if indeed he ever quite grasped them; but to Tre there was a sort of fascination in the lined old face, and she could

almost have drawn a map of the wrinkles and crow's-feet which formed isthmuses and promontories and capes and headlands over it.

Sandy might have stood longer looking down at the kitchen window, if a step coming along the street had not roused him, and, looking round, he saw that it was Pen. The weary, languid step along the baking pavement told him a good deal; the shabby, dusty, black frock, and the brown, rusty crape on her hat, and the small, gloveless hands were very eloquent; but the little face with its great, shining eyes surrounded by dark circles, and the mouth drawn into such lines of patience, the pathetic mixture of childishness and most unchildlike care written on it, were more than Sandy could bear to look at; and a few strides took him to her, and her hands were grasped in his, and he was asking, in rather a husky voice, what the meaning of it all was, and what was the matter.

The color had rushed into Pen's face and a momentary brightness into her eyes, but she shook so that she had to cling to Sandy for a minute before she could go on, and the surprise seemed to have taken away her breath, for she gasped out little, short, breathless sentences in answer to his questions.

“Tre has been ill — And you were away —
And 'Liza has gone.”

“And who is Mr. Mangles?”

A gasp. “Well — you see — the rent was not
paid — and —”

“Oh !” said Sandy.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT 'S TO BE DONE?

BY and by, when Sandy was established in that old armchair in the parlor in which my story began, with Tre in his arms, such a very light Tre, not half the weight of the laughing thing that had clung round his neck on the breakwater at Monkton, he heard more about it, principally from Tre, for Pen, though she was sitting in the old place for confidences, the little stool by his side, was not so communicative as of old, and every now and then would seem to draw in and stop the words that were pressing to be spoken.

Sandy fancied sometimes too that she was listening for some sound outside, for she would break off in the middle of a sentence and start and shiver if a step stopped on the pavement, but perhaps it was only a symptom of the nervous, overstrained condition in which she evidently was.

“What has been the matter with Tre?”

“She was sick, and always tired, and her head ached, and she used to talk all night, and she could not eat anything.”

“ Did you have the doctor? ”

“ No — ” A gasp stopped Pen's voice, but Tre took up the story, with a certain wise, reasonable tone that made Sandy's heart ache. “ We could n't have Dr. Bell, for he had n't been paid for coming to see mother, and we did n't like to send for any one else ; but Pen asked the chemist what he thought was the matter with me, and 'Liza says he's better than any of the doctors, and knows a lot more, and cured her toothache as easy as anything, when she'd been to ever so many doctors and they could n't do nothing.”

“ What did he say? ”

“ He said,” Pen resumed, “ that it was most likely low fever, for there was a lot about, and that we'd better ask a doctor, but he made up a draught.”

“ And,” interrupted Tre, “ he sent me a rose that had come up from the real country, because he remembered me coming to the shop when mother was ill. It was such a beauty, and I've got the leaves still and they smell nice ; and when I'm better I shall go and thank him, and say it made me sleep at night and not think of tigers so much.”

“ But why did 'Liza go away? ”

“ She wanted some money at Whitsuntide and there was none.”

“ But,” pursued Tre, “ it was n’t that, though she said it was hard not to be able to have a new bonnet and go out in a van like every one else ; but she asked father one evening when he was funny, and he was angry, and took hold of her and put her right outside the street door, and she ’d only her cap on, and it was raining, and he would n’t let her in, and she had to run round to the milk-shop and wait till father had gone to sleep, and then we let her in again, but she just packed up her box and went away ; she said she would n’t sleep another night in the house. Father was quite surprised to find she was gone next morning, when me and Pen could n’t make the kitchen fire light anyhow.”

Pen had got up from her seat and gone to the window, and stood with her back turned ; and Sandy could see that she had flushed up to her ears, all over the slight throat that showed so fair above the shabby, black frock, and that Tre’s words, every now and then, produced a quiver in her as of actual physical pain.

As for Sandy he did not notice much what the child was saying ; one word had caught his notice and he stopped at that, turning it over in his mind, — “ funny ” ? — “ one evening when he was funny ” ? — What was the meaning of that ?

“How long is it since 'Liza left?”

“Oh! a long time ago, before I was ill, and then we had Bridget, and then Mrs. Jobson, just for the day you know, and she always wore a bonnet, and then we went on a bit without any one, and then there was Alberta, but she went away the day Mr. Mangles came; she called him such a funny name, what was it, Pen?—and said she would not demean herself to wait on such as him. But he's such a nice, old man, Sandy, I don't see why she should have disliked him so, and he does n't want any one to wait on him, but he does lots of things for us, and lights the kitchen fire, and cooks and carries up the water, and plays the concertina beautiful.”

Just then, as if in illustration of the usefulness of Mr. Mangles, a knock came at the door, and a tea-tray made its appearance with a plate of water-cresses of strong, vigorous growth, arranged round a salt-cellar in the approved style. Only the tea-tray, and a pair of rather snuffy hands holding it, could be seen, as Mr. Mangles was bashful at appearing before company; but Pen went to receive it from him and conveyed it into the room; and though Tre called to him to come in, he could not be prevailed upon to do so, but retired down the kitchen stairs with some indistinct remarks about

“folks wanting their teas,” and “them creases being pretty middlin’.”

“It ’s very kind of him,” Pen said with a tremulous voice, “he ’s not obliged to do it, and Alberta says these men sometimes are so horrid. She said they *always* were ; but he has been so good to us. I think he was sorry for Tre, you know, and he has some grandchildren he ’s fond of, and he says Tre ’s just like one of them. But I don’t think she is, for he came one day and he was such an ugly, little boy, with one eye larger than the other, and a dirty nose.”

“He ’s a very good, little boy,” Tre interrupted reprovingly, being superior herself to pleasing appearances and such superficial attractions, “and very clever, and knows a lot more than I do ; he goes to a Board School, and to the Wesleyan School, on Sundays, and he belongs to the Band of Hope, and wears a blue ribbon and a medal.”

Tre was evidently deeply versed in the history of the Mangles family, and was prepared to retail it for the edification of Sandy, never doubting for a moment that it would be as interesting to him as it had been to her ; for she had beguiled several long sultry afternoons, or sleepless evenings, with listening to slow stories of Juliarann, as lived over Radcliffe way, and worked in the jam factory,

which seemed to Tre, when she was not feeling sick, a pleasant walk of life; and of the young man she was going to marry, who was a chucker-out at a public-house, and broke a man's nose once with a knuckle-duster.

There was a great deal that occurred in the course of the narrative that Tre did not the least understand, but this in no way diminished the interest but rather added to it; which is a fact, I always think, that should be more borne in mind by the writers of literature for the young, who take such elaborate pains to simplify and explain everything, and leave nothing to be wondered over, and no possible wrong conclusions to be arrived at — when, after all, the wondering and the wrong conclusions are half the fun of it.

I am afraid none of the party did much justice to Mr. Mangles' "creases." Tre had no appetite, and was too excited and talked too much; and Pen was nervous and distracted, sometimes acutely conscious of what the child was saying, sometimes evidently with her attention wandering, and with that air of listening for some other sound that Sandy had noticed before; while as for Sandy, it was not dark suspicions of snuff about the water-cresses that kept him from partaking more freely — he would have swallowed it by the half-ounce if

scattered by the hand of any one who had been good to the children — but his thoughts were also distracted by little Tre's talk and by Pen's nervous silence, and by wondering over those words "when he was funny." Except for that there had been no mention of Louis Brand till tea was nearly over, when Sandy asked carelessly, "Where 's the signor?" taking care not to look at Pen as he said it, but conscious all the same of a quiver and a sudden necessity for clearing the tea-things away.

"He 's not come in yet," Tre said, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, as if it were a subject not to be discussed openly, "he don't come in sometimes till long, long, long after I'm in bed; and once it was quite light when Pen came up to bed. It seemed so funny undressing by daylight, but we could n't go to sleep; Pen's eyes were so wide open, were n't they, Pen? as if they never would close up any more, so we did n't try, but talked about mother, and Pen said that was better than going to sleep."

The tea-things were all collected, by this time, on the tray, with more clatter and noise than Pen's actions were wont to occasion, and she lifted the tray to carry it out. Sandy half got up to set Tre down and take the tray, which looked too heavy for the slight arms, but he wanted a word with Tre

alone, and this seemed his only chance, so he let Pen carry the tray out, and then quickly asked the question he was longing to have answered, but which he could not ask before Pen, as he intuitively felt that it would touch her on the very quick.

“What did you mean by father being funny?”

The child was silent, drawing her brows together with a puzzled, thoughtful look.

“I don't quite know; Pen won't let me talk of it. But I've been thinking, Sandy, that perhaps it's the low fever father has, for Mr. Timmens said it was so much about. He's just like me sometimes in the morning, and his head is awful bad, and he can't eat nothing, and he don't like the leastest noise. And Pen says *I* was sometimes funny at night, and talked nonsense, and did not know what I said, and sometimes I cried, and sometimes I laughed and sang, but I did not remember anything about it when I woke in the morning, you know, Sandy, was n't it funny? And I've been thinking father must have caught the low fever too, don't you think so, Sandy?”

That was all there was time for then, happily for Sandy's sincerity, as Pen came back and Tre seemed to understand that, in her presence, the discussion of father's ailments had better drop.

Sandy had a lot to tell them on his side of his travels and adventures, and of young Tom and their illness, and of the lovely Italian lakes and the beautiful Swiss mountains ; he was quite surprised to find how much of the beauty he had taken in and appreciated, while at the time it had hardly seemed to give him any pleasure at all. But it all seemed to squeeze out of him now that Tre's arm was round his neck and Pen's big eyes were raised to his ; while all the time he talked, his mind only half followed his words, while the other half was pondering and trying to devise some scheme for setting matters right, as there was no doubt they were woefully wrong.

It was late when tea was ended, and they sat on in the dusk by the window, while Sandy talked and Tre grew silent, and her head pressed on Sandy's shoulder, and the face he looked down on in the twilight was very white and tired-looking. Once he proposed to light the gas, but Pen hastily discouraged the idea, and Sandy guessed that it had been cut off and said no more ; but it puzzled him to think why Pen was evidently so anxious that he should not stop when she took Tre up to bed. She was plainly in a fever of anxiety to get rid of him, and yet she had been most unfeignedly pleased to see him, and more than once she had

said it was all right now he had come back, and that she had so much to tell him. But now she begged him with tears in her eyes not to wait till she came down again, and, when he said that he wanted to see the signor, she assured him that it might be very late before her father returned, and that next morning would be much better altogether.

She was so troubled and anxious about it that at last Sandy reluctantly agreed to go after he had had a word or two with Mr. Mangles, and he went down into the kitchen for that purpose after carrying Tre up to her room.

Mr. Mangles was smoking very strong tobacco, and the kitchen, which had been sacred to 'Liza in old times, was now reeking with smoke, enough to make even Sandy's well-seasoned eyes smart and prick. In answer to Sandy's questions he said, "Yes, I were put in a week to-day. Sprigg and Bateman's my governors, and Mason's the landlord, lives round the corner in Beeston Street. Oh, it ain't for much, bless yer! and things could be arranged in a jiffy. Mason ain't the man to be 'ard on a gent as is down on his luck; but he's a bit pinched himself is Mason, 'ouses don't pay nohow, what with run-away tenants and repairs constant, and all this 'ullabaloo about drainage and

water as parties makes nowadays, so he 's forced to look after his rent pretty sharp, he is, and small blame to him. But lookey here, if you're a friend of the guvnor here, you just give him a tip to mind what he 's up to with them two ;" and Mr. Mangles gave a significant jerk with the stem of his pipe over his shoulder, in the direction of the staircase, to indicate Pen and Tre. "Ain't he got any aunts or mothers or such like belonging to him as could take 'em clear away out of this? it's just killing of 'em ! They ain't the sort to rough it ; there 's children as takes to debt and botheration like ducks to the water and thrives on it, and there 's others as it just kills, and that 's them," said Mr. Mangles oracularly, resuming his pipe and drawing at it fiercely, till his nostrils grew round and black and distended. "See the guvnor first thing to-morrow? And get me out? All right, sir, very good, nothin' 'd please me better ; but — I 'm dashed if I knows 'ow they 'll get along without nobody to do nothing, them two little gals as is ladies every inch of 'em, and did oughter have servants awaitin' on 'em 'and and foot. Why, bless yer ! I've seen duchesses' and countesses' children as could n't 'old a candle to 'em," ended Mr. Mangles, warming into eloquence, and having no doubt had vast experience among the children of the aristocracy

— perhaps when he was in possession at the ducal residences.

This was a difficulty which Sandy had not calculated upon, having been used to regard a man in possession as an unmixed evil, and not as a substitute for a maid-of-all-work, but it was arranged by Mr. Mangles remembering “a sister-law” of his daughter’s, “as is a widder woman and could come in and do for them, as ’as a kind ’art and ’ave brought up a fambly of her own.”

That being settled, Sandy took his leave, thanking the old man for his kindness, but rendered still more uneasy in his mind by Mr. Mangles’ knowing wink and meaning gesture when Louis Brand’s name was mentioned, and his evident unconcealed opinion that their father’s house was no place for the little girls.

He was conscious too that Pen was listening for his departure on the landing above, having come more than once, in her restless impatience, to the top of the kitchen stairs while he was talking to Mr. Mangles; and he almost fancied he heard a sigh of relief as he opened the street door and passed out into the sultry August night in Purton Street.

He had accommodated himself to Pen’s wishes so far as leaving No. 37 was concerned, but he had

not undertaken to go home and to bed, nor even to leave Purton Street, nor to go out of sight of the door; and he had firmly made up his mind not to do so till he had seen Louis Brand go in, and satisfied himself as to whether the fears and suspicions about him, that Tre's words and Pen's looks and Mr. Mangles' hints had aroused, were founded on fact.

The clock of a neighboring church struck nine soon after he came out, and he heard it strike ten and eleven while he paced up and down the streets in the immediate neighborhood, never going far from Purton Street, but always coming back every few minutes to see if the light were still burning in the sitting-room window, showing that Mr. Brand had not yet returned. He did not pass and repass the house, as he knew that the window was open, and that Pen's ear would catch the sound of his footstep, and she would guess his object; but once or twice he drew near enough to look in, and see her as she sat at the table, leaning her head on her hands, having pushed aside the book and work-basket, which could not occupy her thoughts, a sad, desolate, little figure, which made Sandy's heart bleed as he watched it.

Once as he stood there, he heard Mr. Mangles' voice urging her to go up to bed.

"Doey now! where's the good of setting up? I ain't near done my pipe, nor sha'n't adone till the guvnor comes in, and I'll see to him all right. He were just about put out t' other night, a-finding you a-waiting up, and, bless yer! I'm a deal more used to parties like that, and knows how to humor 'em. Wants to tell him about the gentleman having called in, doey? Why! you'd a lot better wait and tell him to-morrow."

Sandy could not bear to hear any more, and turned away; but Mr. Mangles' persuasions evidently failed in their object, for when next he came in sight of the window with the undrawn blind, the little figure still sat there, with the head leaning on the hands, in the same attitude of weary patience, and Mr. Mangles had retreated to the kitchen.

Sandy had been travelling all day, and was not by any means as strong as he had been before his illness; and young Tom would certainly have been strengthened in his impression, that Sandy did not know how to take care of himself, if he could have seen him, hard upon midnight, pacing the streets about Dalston; but Sandy forgot his own weariness and that he had had no dinner, and partaken very sparingly of Mr. Mangles' watercresses and bread and butter. The distant roar of the great city was

sinking into the comparative silence of London night, and, in the streets along which he paced, the passers-by grew few and far between, augmented in numbers and noise for a short time after eleven when the public houses closed. He noticed also at that time a reappearance of children about the streets, and the sound of babies crying, and, on questioning a group huddled in a doorway, he found that these sadly wise and experienced small creatures had found it was better to be out of the way when their elders came in, till they had settled down to their heavy drunken slumbers, and the children could creep back to the corner of bed or floor allotted to them, without fear of a kick or a blow.

Up above, the August sky was clear, and the great white moon looked down as quietly and calmly on all the crime and cruelty of London, as Sandy had seen it three nights before on the lake of Thun's unruffled breast, and on the fair snow mountains ; but Sandy's heart was too anxious and troubled to get any calm from the cold, unfeeling thing, that sailed so serenely through the small clouds ; the very gas-lamps seemed more sympathetic with their red blinking light.

It was close on twelve when at last a footstep turned the corner into Purton Street, familiar and

yet unfamiliar to Sandy. It was Louis Brand's step, but with a difference, and Sandy's worst fears were realized as he followed him along the street, and noticed how heavy and uncertain it was, and how he swerved more than once and caught at the railings to steady himself. He stopped once in the light of the street lamp and Sandy saw his face, the face that Theresa Brand loved so well, and died loving and trusting; the face that Pen and little Tre looked up to as their father's face, and were bidden by God's law to honor. Heaven pity them!

Sandy's heart was so hot within him that he could hardly restrain himself from seizing this wretched man, who had been his friend, by the arm, and telling him the disgust and indignation he felt, but he resisted the impulse, and watched his unsteady progress till he reached No. 37 and made an ineffectual attempt to open the door with his latch-key.

The next moment the door was opened, and Sandy heard Louis Brand's voice in some indistinct exclamation of anger, and, involuntarily, Sandy started forward and was on the doorstep as the door closed, in time to hear a cry, a sobbing, broken-hearted, desolate, little cry. Could he have struck her? Oh! never, never! that

tender, gentle, little soul with her mother's sweet, appealing eyes !

He seized the door and set his knee against it, as if he would have forced it open, and then his hands dropped to his side, with the feeling of the uselessness of such interference. He could hear voices on the other side of the door, Mr. Mangles' among them ; and he stood there listening till the sounds died away, and the lights in the downstairs windows were extinguished, and a passing policeman turned his bull's-eye suspiciously on the tall figure that stood still on the doorstep of No. 37.

He could not have struck her ! Sandy felt that he could have murdered that one-time friend of his if he could have believed this possible ; but it does not need an actual physical blow to hurt a tender creature like that to the very death. "There 's others as it just kills," Mr. Mangles had said, "and that 's them."

"What 's to be done?" Sandy asked himself. "What can I do?" And, as he asked himself the question, there came back to him the memory of an early spring morning in Covent Garden Market, with the chill dawn struggling into the sky, and Pen's childish face, white and sad then, but not with the desperate sadness of to-day, look-

ing at him across the white lilies and pure azalea, as pure and as innocent as the flowers, and saying, "I was thinking, Sandy, that if I were older you might have married me, and taken care of Tre and me instead of father."

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOOING.

“**I** NEVER heard tell of such goings on ! ” Mrs. Jones’s niece said next morning, “ and him, as aunt says, was as steady and reg’lar in his ’abits as old Time, not a-comin’ in till close on one in the morning and waken me up, as ’ad only jes’ drop off through the teethache, as ain’t ’ad no rest for nights, and then not a word but mumbling something about ’avin’ forgot his latch-key ! And never going to bed all night neither, but a-trampin’ up and down over’ead, and the bed not slep’ in, and wantin’ his breakfas’ at eight o’clock as negro slaves ain’t nothin’ to it ! ”

Sandy was hardly accountable for his actions that night, for in those few hours of pacing up and down, he had gone through as much mental exercise and emotion as some men spread over several years of their life, had read the whole first volume of his life’s romance at one sitting, instead of a page now and a chapter then, as is the ordinary method in studying that enthralling

work. He had to rearrange his whole life and get it into proper perspective from this very new point of view ; to get used to ideas that were so marvelous and new, and yet so intoxicatingly sweet, that he could hardly realize that such enchantment could befall him ; to try and put all the facts impartially before himself and judge what was right and fair and best for every one ; struggling to be quite reasonable, when always hitherto he had seemed to be reasonable without a struggle ; to put aside a voice that he had never in all his life been conscious of hearing before, and that now, on a sudden, had waxed so wondrously eloquent, that it made his heart beat, and his pulses throb, and his eyes grow dim. All his life hitherto he had seemed a spectator of other people's joys and sorrows, and now, all at once, he was the actor, and was aware of strong individuality and personal wishes that were almost passionate in their strength, and rose-colored dreams, not for others, or rather not only for others, but for himself.

It seemed like an incredible, almost absurd fairy tale at first, the idea that he, Sandy Maclaren, who was getting to regard himself as quite an elderly man, and was certainly so regarded by young Tom and his father, should have a wife, a sweet child-wife like Pen ; should have the right, not only to

meddle in her concerns now and again, and put in an occasional helping hand to avert some of the catastrophes that threatened her, but to take her clear out of all the trouble ; that it should be his duty and his right to shield her from the least breath of sorrow or uneasiness ; to compass her about with sweet observances ; to make her life all sunshine, and lead her to forget poverty, and anxiety, and care.

This child-wife should have as long a time of happy girlhood as she pleased, before she settled to the more serious happiness of married life, she should be like other girls — be beautifully dressed, and go to balls and dance, and ride in the Row. He racked his brains to remember the sort of life his young lady cousins lived, at the time when he used to frequent their houses in the holidays, and, with stupid want of observation, had hardly noticed their butterfly comings and goings, except to think them silly and tiresome.

If only some prophetic feeling had told him then that twenty years or so later he should want such experience for his wife, what a store of useful information he might have hoarded. Now the only thing that remained with him was a confused memory of the scent of stephanotis, and of cobwebby dresses that seemed to tear if school-boy

feet came within half a mile of them, and of a French maid chattering volubly as she gave finishing touches. It was not easy to imagine little Pen with her rusty, black frock, and her fair, ruffled plaits, and her serious face in such circumstances, and, after all, Sandy hardly wished such a transformation in his Cinderella.

It should all be just as she liked ; if she had a fancy for further education — though, to Sandy's mind, this was quite unnecessary — she should have masters and teaching of the best. She should travel and see beautiful scenery and pictures ; she should go to the opera ; she should be presented at court. The reader will observe to what a length Sandy's madness had reached when he had come to planning a society life for Pen, a life which was of all things the one he had hitherto most loathed.

He rummaged about in an out-of-the-way box which he had not overhauled for years, making much noise in the process over the long-suffering head of Mrs. Jones's niece, for some rings of his mother's, which had been sent him soon after Tom's marriage, when his father had made a division of his wife's jewelry between her two sons. Sandy had never set much store by the things, and accordingly they had never been lost or stolen.

Among them was her wedding-ring, such a little one ! Sandy recalled having heard that her hands were very small, he could just get the top of his little finger into it, and, as he held it there, a warmer feeling for the dead mother came into her son's heart than he had ever been conscious of before, and a wish that she were living to take his little bride into her arms and love and bless her ; and he kissed the little dull gold circle, partly for the mother's sake, partly for Pen's.

He was taking it quite for granted, you will say, that Pen would agree to marry him, and I do not think that, among the many doubts and uncertainties that occurred to his mind, he ever reckoned on any unwillingness on Pen's part.

That eight-o'clock breakfast, which was so complained of by Mrs. Jones's niece, would have been asked for two hours earlier if it had not been for severe self-restraint on the part of Sandy ; there is a good deal to be done and seen after on the eve of one's wedding-day, especially when the proposal has yet to be made and the parents' consent obtained.

He had meant to see Mr. Mangles' employers and get the immediate removal of that worthy, but, on reflection, he came to the conclusion that, since the children (he could not all of a sudden get out

of thinking of Pen as a child) would leave Purton Street the following day, and little Tre was evidently fond of the old man, and Pen had got used to his presence, and he was kind and helpful, it might be as well to let him remain for another day.

The first thing to be done was to see Louis Brand, and that was not to be accomplished very early in the morning at the best of times; and when Sandy knocked at the door of No. 37 at ten o'clock he hardly hoped to find him visible, and was surprised to find he was in the studio, which Mr. Mangles irreverently described as "fust floor back;" and Sandy made his way up there unannounced.

"For heaven's sake, shut that door, and don't make such an infernal noise! — Why, hollo! Sandy, is it you? Where on earth have you sprung from? And what's become of you all these months? Oh! you need n't trouble to look at that," with a dreary laugh, "there's nothing new;" for Sandy, with hardly a glance at the prostrate figure of Louis Brand lying stretched on the divan half dressed, had crossed the room to the easel and turned the canvas, which stood upon it with its face to the wall.

Nothing new indeed! it seemed to Sandy that the pretty, little view of Monkton Street with the

old-fashioned, irregular houses and groups of fishermen coming down with their nets, was exactly at the same stage as when he had looked at it last, four months ago, when Louis Brand was working enthusiastically at it, with hardly time to spare to answer the questions Sandy asked him.

Sandy, standing there in grim silence, looking down at the pretty, unfinished picture, was not a soothing sight to any one with a racking headache, and nerves all strained and out of tune, and a feverish mouth and an irritable brain. In such circumstances it is almost unendurable to have a personified conscience standing there, an accusing angel, as represented by Sandy in his dusty coat, with his eyebrows drawn together, and his mouth shut in such grimly eloquent silence.

Louis Brand irritably tossed over on his side, to be out of sight of the tall figure.

“Oh, yes! — all right! — I know! — Don’t hit a fellow when he ’s down!”

Still silence. Sandy was realizing how long this must have been going on, how long Pen must have been suffering and fretting and sorrowing, almost ever since he went away; — all those four months of beautiful spring, and fair early summer, and hot midsummer weather, no more work done, no more money coming in — if only he had known!

By and by he came and sat down in the arm-chair by the divan, and Louis Brand drew himself up into a sitting posture with his back against the wall, and his knees up to his chin, and his hands in his hair, which, Sandy noticed, had streaks of gray in its blackness.

There was something so hopeless in his appearance, so despairing and pitiful, that the flame of anger that had been burning in Sandy's heart against him all night died down into the ashes of pity, and, after a few minutes' silence, he stretched out his hand and laid it on Louis Brand's shoulder.

"Why did n't you tell me, old fellow? Why did n't you let me know?"

And Louis Brand's head sank lower, and the bitter, stubborn feeling of resentment which had been growing in him since Sandy came in, and the excuses, and the sense of somehow having been hardly dealt with and having more to contend with than other men, and having, after all, not been so much to blame, melted away, and he saw himself pretty well as he really was, without the pretences and allowances and excuses with which we are all of us in the habit of decking out ourselves before our indulgent mind's eye. I do not fancy if Sandy had hurled at him all those indignant reproaches that had been turning on his lips the night before,

Louis Brand would have felt half so utterly abject and worthless and inexcusable, as he did with the touch of Sandy's pitying hand on his shoulder. Perhaps when the books are opened, the pity in the Judge's eye may not be the least of that day's terrors to the guilty soul.

He was in no condition for any reasonable consultation as to what had best be done ; at one time he grew hysterical and Sandy was afraid that Pen might hear or that he would have to call in help ; but then he quieted down into silence that seemed almost the stupefaction of despair, and Sandy hardly knew if he listened or understood, as he unfolded to him that plan he had been maturing, as he tramped up and down his bedroom in the night, and which sounded still more strange and improbable, as he put it into words in broad daylight ; it seemed like telling a dream, with all its grotesque abruptness and want of sequence, facts and persons shaken up together anyhow, like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, which form now and then pretty and striking combinations.

"Do as you like ! Do as you like !" was all that Louis Brand said. He expressed no surprise, he made no objection. It was certainly an unique way of receiving a proposal for a daughter's hand ; and when Sandy got up at last to go and find Pen,

it was with an unsatisfactory feeling of doubt whether the consent Louis Brand had given, was anything more than a mechanical agreement, without any consciousness of his meaning.

“You understand?” he turned back to ask, “there is no mistake about it? I am going to ask little Pen to marry me to-morrow, and I shall take her and Tre right away. You understand? You have no objection? You can’t suggest any other plan?”

And then Louis Brand lifted his head, and looked up with his haggard, sunken eyes, from which all the brightness had gone, and said: “Their mother has gone, the children had better go too. It’s all right, — you can do as you like.”

And then his head fell again, and Sandy left him, sitting there with his head on his folded arms, resting on his knees.

There was no one in the sitting-room below, and the only sound to be heard was Mr. Mangles whistling and knife-cleaning in the kitchen, so Sandy made his way down there, and found him dividing his attention between the knife-board and a small saucepan on the fire, from which issued a savory smell when the lid was raised.

“Good-morning! Where are the young ladies?” asked Sandy.

Mr. Mangles jerked a carving-knife over his shoulder. "The little un have had a terrible bad night, she 'ave, and she 've just drop off and I 'm gettin' a drop of broth ready agin she wakes. She brisked up when you come along, as has a deal of sperrit, but I could see as she was pretty well done when I step up to say good-night; she could n't 'ardly do more than kiss 'er little 'and, bless 'er! I ain't 'ad no notice from my chiefs to clear out, I don't know if you've called round there? I got my traps together thinking as 'ow I'd be fetched most likely fust thing."

"No," said Sandy. "I have been thinking it over, and I thought that could be settled to-morrow. I'm going to —" and here the intended bridegroom stammered and grew red to the roots of his hair; it seemed to him almost as ridiculous an idea, his marrying Pen, as if Mr. Mangles had proposed to marry Tre, so he ended the sentence — "take the children away to-morrow, and I expect Mr. Brand will leave too. Is Miss Pen upstairs? I'll go and find her."

Pen came to the door, with her finger to her lips, when he knocked, and she showed him little Tre, lying half across the bed, which was all tumbled and tossed about with the night's feverish disquiet. There was no doubt the child looked very ill, as

she lay in this exhausted sleep, with her eyes only half closed and the dry lips drawn and parched, and her arms tossed over her head, in an unnatural attitude, quite unlike a healthy child's sleeping grace.

Sandy stood a moment, looking down at her, trying to keep what he felt from appearing in his face ; for Pen was scanning it, with that craving to read a brighter opinion than she could persuade herself to feel.

The little bedroom was so hot, the sun was beating on the window, and the blind had come partly unnailed from the roller, letting in a shaft of dusty sunlight, which was only kept from falling full on the child's face by the bed-curtain being pinned across, thus also keeping out the air — such as it was, coming from the dust-bins and back-yards of Purton Street. A vision rose before Sandy's mind's eye of some big, airy bedroom, with trees outside the open window, and the wide sea beyond, and fresh, sweet, life-giving air blowing in, and dainty, little, white beds, and a motherly, responsible-looking nurse, under whose skilful treatment fever and exhaustion might be chased away, and happy, bonnie, little Tre come back, with bright eyes and round, rosy cheeks and merry laughter.

And then Sandy took Pen's hands in his and

drew her away from the bedside, out on to the little landing, and closed the door gently behind them. Such a dreary, dingy, little landing, with the stair-carpet ragged and worn, and one of the paltry, little banisters splintered and broken ; with the paint peeling off the hand-rail and the skirting-board, and a jagged strip torn from the wall-paper, which would have had the intelligent public believe that houses in Purton Street were built of huge blocks of glistening gray granite divided by blue mortar. The whole scene in its meanness and unattractiveness was photographed on Sandy's brain, to be recalled in many a year to come as holding all that earth has of the most beautiful, for which he would gladly have resigned the most splendid surroundings, luxury, picturesqueness, everything, to stand once more with Pen's little hands in his and with the wonderful growing feeling swelling, strengthening, living in his heart.

Oh, reader, it is a great mystery, this feeling of love ! I wonder why we all are so apt to make a joke of it, when Saint Paul himself spoke of it as so great a mystery that it might be even compared to the union between Christ and His Church !

"Pen," he said, "little Pen" — and, while he hesitated, the sounds of Mr. Mangles' birdlike whistle rose from the kitchen, and swish, swish

from the knife-board, "I am years older than you, and you are hardly more than a child, and I am not a bit the sort of man to take a girl's fancy, but I want to know if you will marry me, and let me take you and Tre right away, and try to make up to you for all the trouble and wretchedness? I think you like me, Pen — you and Tre have always seemed to like me, and I am fonder of you than all the world besides, and my whole life shall be given to make you happy."

She was silent, gazing up at him with wide, startled eyes, that seemed fascinated by his rapid words, so different from his usual slow speech. Her hands in his turned quite cold, but she did not take them away, and he drew them nearer and pressed them closer, as he went on speaking.

"If there were any other way, I would not ask it of you, and it will be merely a form, over and done with in half an hour, and then we will forget all about it, and you shall still be little Pen, still a child as long as ever you like. I will be so patient, dear, till some day — some day —"

And then his voice shook and broke, and his eyes took up the tale of what might befall when that some day came.

And then, of a sudden, he flung her hands from him and leaned against the wall, and hid his face

from the clear eyes that looked so simply up to his.

“Oh, my God! am I doing right? Isn't it a wicked, cowardly thing I'm doing, a thing for which some day you may turn and reproach me for having spoilt your life and done you a grievous wrong, that your sweet, young life should have been tied to mine, before you knew what it meant?”

She was trembling a little now, and the color was coming and going in her cheeks, and her hands were twisting together, and her eyes had dropped with a sudden feeling of shame, some utterly new feeling, that there might be more in her eyes than even Sandy should read all at once, for the voice of love to the pure, young heart is as the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the evening to Adam and Eve, and it is ashamed and seeks to hide itself.

In those few minutes, since Sandy closed the door on little, sleeping Tre, before Mr. Mangles had come to the end of that elaborate tune he was whistling, before the knives of the family, few as they were, had been polished to his satisfaction, little Pen had crossed the boundary, “where the brook and river meet, womanhood and childhood fleet.” Sometimes the transit takes years, some-

times it is made in a moment, as there was a moment when marble Galatea blushed into living, loving womanhood under Pygmalion's eyes, or when the sleeping Princess woke from her long slumber at the Prince's kiss.

"You shall still be a child as long as ever you like," Sandy had said, not knowing that even as he spoke, childhood had gone and that little Pen could be a child no more.

"Will you trust me, little Pen?" he said, and for all answer she put her hands in his.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WEDDING-DRESS.

I WONDER if there was ever a bride, however young or however old, who thought nothing of her wedding-dress. Certainly, if such there have been, too wise and experienced or too young and innocent to think of such a trifle, Pen was not one of them ; for Tre was greatly mystified and slightly provoked by Pen's persistent divings into drawers, and burrowings into heaps of long-disused garments, in out-of-the-way boxes, till at last a certain white muslin frock was brought to light, which Pen had worn more than a year before at her Confirmation ; a frock of which every tuck had been run, and every simple little fold arranged, by her mother's hand. I believe it is the fashion now for grown-up young ladies to speak of their outer garments as frocks ; they used in their mothers' time to be called dresses, and in their grandmothers' gowns ; but this little white Confirmation garment of Pen's was no elaborate Parisian confection or arrangement of some exquisite man-

milliner, but a frock pure and simple ; certainly simple as far as any fashion or style was concerned, and as pure as was to be expected after a year of even the most careful stowing away in London.

It was crumpled, to be sure, but that was easily to be rectified with an iron ; but Pen's eyes, as she held it up before her, detected a shortness in the skirt, which no shaking or pulling would obviate. It was a humiliating fact, but Pen could not disguise from herself, that she had grown since that frock was made, and that there was nothing for it but to let down a tuck to make it wearable.

Now I do not think that in all the various circumstances attending weddings, it can often have been necessary for a bride to let down a tuck in her wedding-dress, so I think I may claim originality in this respect for my little heroine ; though she felt bitterly ashamed of it herself, and her cheek grew quite hot and flushed, as she took out the careful, little stitches that mother had sat up so late to finish, the night before the Confirmation.

Tre was very restless and fretful that day, and more than once Pen had to stop in her unpicking, and take the feverish, uneasy, little thing in her arms, and press the hot cheek to hers, and rock gently backwards and forwards, crooning out some tune, a Moody and Sankey hymn or a music-hall song

or an operatic bit made familiar by the organs. Nothing seemed to quiet Tre so well as this, and it would sometimes lull her into a doze, not sound enough however to last, if the song or the movement ceased for a moment.

In the afternoon Dr. Bell came in, having been sent by Sandy; and he stopped quite a long time, and looked so kind and pitiful, and scolded them for not having sent for him sooner, as if in the course of his practice he did not, day after day, come across cases as piteous and heart-breaking as these two little, motherless girls.

“Mr. Maclaren tells me he is going to take you both away to-morrow if little Miss Tre here is up to the journey.” He wondered a little at the sudden rush of color into Pen’s listening face, and it recalled to his memory a similar manifestation on Sandy’s part, when he mentioned this arrangement, but this coincidence did not lead him within a hundred miles of the right conclusion. “She certainly would not be up to it to-day,” he went on, “but this sort of feverish attack is often intermittent, and you tell me she seemed quite herself yesterday, so I dare say to-morrow may be a favorable day. If necessary precautions are taken and not too long a journey is attempted, I think it can be managed without risk. But I will come in and

see her to-morrow morning, and will send in a draught," etc., etc.

"Is Sandy going to take us away, Pen?" Tre asked when Dr. Bell had gone. "Where are we going? Is it to that place he told us about, where they eat macaroni and the lizards run about? It's so far off, Pen, and I don't like macaroni, and Mr. Mangles thinks lizards bite. I think I'd rather stop here. I like near places," said the weary, little soul, aching all over, and restless, and wanting something without knowing what. "And oh, Pen, it's not naughtiness! it's not naughtiness! but I do so want to see the monkey with the red jacket!" And then she cried, protesting all the time it was not naughtiness, and yet half believing it was, and that little girls who cried for monkeys must be naughty; knowing at any rate that she was very wretched, and wanted something very much, dreadfully, and she thought what she wanted must be the monkey, unless it was something else, perhaps mother.

She was too ill and tired and confused in the head even to be curious and ask questions; and Pen could only comfort her and cuddle her up against the heart that was so full of its new happiness, — painfully full as if it must burst with the greatness of it.

She had told it to mother. For the last few months, when there had been so much trouble and no one but Tre to tell it to, she had found it a great relief, when Tre was in bed at night, to kneel down by the little bed and hide her head in the bedclothes, and pour it all out, aloud sometimes, sometimes to herself, but always fancying it was to mother she was telling it, and always keeping up the same loving little pretence that mother and daughter had preserved between them about all that concerned Louis Brand, — it was never his fault, he was never to be blamed, some excuse must always be found for him.

But that morning, when Pen came back into Tre's room, after that talk with Sandy, which had changed her from a child to a woman; when she found the little sister still asleep, and, kneeling down, buried her face in the old fashion to tell what had happened to mother, that mother seemed so near, so distinctly present, that when the touch of a hand came on her head, it did not the least surprise or frighten the girl, nor would she have believed if you or I or any number of reliable witnesses had testified that it was only Tre's feverish, little hand that had rested there and was then tossed away again.

"She knows about it and she is pleased," Pen told herself, with firm conviction.

Sandy had given her his mother's wedding-ring. Small as it was, it had slipped easily on to her finger — such a childish-looking finger, that had never had a ring round it before, since the bead-rings which she used to thread when she was almost a baby. He had meant to take it back again as a guide for the size of the ring he would buy ; but, after the manner of rings, especially on unaccustomed fingers, it did not come off as easily as it went on, and just as she was trying to remove it, she fancied she heard Tre calling, and went away, still with the ring on her finger, and there it remained, while she told mother ; and, after that, till Tre woke, she sat and looked at her left hand, with a little laugh lurking round the corners of her mouth, that were wont to droop so sadly, and with a tinge of color in her cheeks that were usually so pale and wan. Do what she would that hand would not look natural with the wedding-ring on it, would not look a bit like mother's hand, on which the wedding-ring, loose as it became in her long illness, seemed as natural a part as either of the slender fingers or the blue veins. She took it off by and by, and put it on the ribbon she wore round her neck, suspending a little

locket Sandy had given her on her eighth birthday, with a lock of mother's hair in it.

There were so many interruptions to the undoing of that tuck, from Tre's restlessness and Dr. Bell's long visit, and from various little household occupations, that could not be dispensed with even on the eve of a wedding-day, that it was not till the evening that the ironing could be accomplished, and then not till Tre was in bed ; and Pen more than once debated in her mind if her black frock could not be made to do. But at last Tre was quiet and inclined to sleep, and father, when she knocked at the studio door, called out that he did not want anything and that she had better go to bed.

She stood outside the door, with the crumpled muslin frock on her arm, feeling a little sore and sad. Sandy had told her that father knew all about it and was quite satisfied, and painful as were some of the memories of the past months, there was nothing but love in her heart just then, and she wanted to tell him so and yet she did not want to worry him. It was comfort untold to know he was there and seemed to have no intention of going out, so there would be no weary vigil for her with the usual grievous humiliation of his return. He had been out for

a short time in the afternoon, and her heart had sunk when she heard him leave the house, but he had come back in a very few minutes, and had again shut himself up in the studio, and had hardly answered when she came to the door before.

"May I come in-and say good-night?" she asked.

"Good-night," was the reply.

"May I come in?"

No answer, and she went in with her heart beating.

He was sitting just as Sandy left him on the divan, with his knees drawn up and his head resting on them. The small benzoline lamp on the mantelpiece gave a dull, smoky light, that only seemed to make the darkness of the room more apparent, and, through the uncurtained window, the moon threw a long, cold line of light across the room, on to the empty easel from which the picture had fallen, or been thrown, face downwards, on the floor.

Pen came across and knelt by his side, timidly putting her arm over his bowed shoulders.

"Father," she said, "won't you kiss me?"

He looked up at her with eyes that hardly seemed to recognize her, and then disengaged her

arm from his neck and turned her head so that the light of the lamp fell upon her face.

“Theresa !” he said, “sweet wife ! lady-love ! good-by !” And then he seemed to recollect himself, and he turned almost fretfully from her. “Go to bed, child,” he said ; “I never thought you were the least like your mother. Why should you look at me with her eyes ?”

Then he relapsed into his old position, and she sat by his side, frightened by his strange manner and afraid to irritate him by further words.

Presently she ventured to lay her hand on his shabby velvet sleeve, and he started, as if he had been unconscious of her presence, but he spoke more kindly.

“There, run away, little Pen ; it can’t be helped, and the sooner you forget all about me the better, but you can tell her — Oh ! there, never mind ! Good-night.” And he kissed her and pushed her gently away from him, and she went away, still more sad and puzzled than when she came.

It was rather difficult to explain to Mr. Mangles the necessity for ironing a muslin dress at nine o’clock at night, when there was no one to sit up for, nor object in devising work to fill up time which otherwise might have hung heavy on hand. Moreover the kitchen fire was low, and the iron

itself not easily to be found, having been used of late mainly for keeping the scullery door open.

Pen too was not a great adept at the art, not having had much experience in the higher branches, and it made her nervous Mr. Mangles looking on and offering advice between the puffs of his pipe ; as one of his numerous daughters having been a clear-starcher and getter up of fine things, he was well acquainted with the tricks of the trade.

Pen was contemplating retiring upstairs to be out of the way of the tobacco smoke and advice ; but Mr. Mangles was so good-natured in finding the iron and getting up the fire, that she was afraid of hurting his feelings and, besides, the iron would get cold in the transit and would require reheating at intervals, though to start with she got it so hot as to scorch the front breadth and raise a blister on her poor, little thumb.

The ironing would have been a very lengthy business — indeed I doubt if it would have been accomplished much before the hour at which the dress would be required next morning — if Mr. Mangles had not volunteered to take a turn at it. Not that Pen was a helpless, little person by any means or unused to do such things for herself ; but this evening she was nervous and excited, as was

not unnatural ; and ironing is a thing that should be done calmly, as indeed most things should ; and scorching and blisters were the consequence, and very bright eyes, and a hot patch on either cheek, and breath coming in a panting, difficult way as if the next breath would be a sob ; so, when next the iron wanted heating, Mr. Mangles, who had been taking in the situation out of what he called the tail of his eye, kept possession of it, and gently elbowed Pen out of the way, and turned up his shirt-sleeves and pushed his hat to the back of his head, and set to, as if, like his accomplished daughter, he had been brought up to be clear-starcher and getter up of fine things to the nobility and gentry.

And so Pen's wedding-dress was ironed by a snuffy old broker's man — and not a bad job either, he declared with honest pride, as he wiped his forehead with his spotted, red pocket-handkerchief, and surveyed his work lying on the blanket before him.

"It ain't the fust time as I've tried my 'and at it when my gal had a 'eavy job on, and Ameliar, she says, as is fond of her jokes, 'I'll take you on reg'lar when I'm short of 'ands,' says she."

The only thing to which Pen demurred was Mr. Mangles' habit of spitting on the iron every time it

was reheated ; but that he assured her was quite *de rigueur*, and in no way to be dispensed with or superseded by any more elegant way of testing the heat of the iron.

There must have been something suggestive of weddings and bridal doings about that little muslin frock, simple as it was ; for, somehow, Mr. Mangles' conversation drifted in that direction — not that he had the very vaguest suspicion that he was exercising his skill on a wedding-dress ; he would no more have thought of such a thing in connection with little Pen than he would with a baby in arms — Pen, in her childish, black frock and hair that had escaped from the pins that fastened it in a coil at the back of her head, and fell, first of all, in heavy plaits on her shoulders, and then by degrees gradually untwisted itself into long, soft strands of silky fineness.

And yet the talk was of weddings, and among them of this same Ameliar's marriage, the clear-starcher and getter up of fine things, of whose skill he had spoken. "And between you and me, Missy, I believe it were more than 'arf the name that done it. She could n't abide the name of Mangles, though she might have 'ad a worser to my thinkin' ; but washin' bein' 'er trade, as the sayin' is, folks was fond of jokin' 'er about 'er name.

‘Manglin’ done ‘ere,’ they’d say, or ‘Turn the Mangle,’ or ‘Mangles ‘eavy in ‘and,’ and such like, till she were kinder savage, and vowed she’d change it afore ever she went into business for ‘erself, and ‘ad cards struck off, and a notice in the parler winder. She was mighty well pleased when she took up with a young feller by the name of Neville, and she thought it mighty fine, and said ‘t were in the peerage and all sorts ; but, bless yer ! she changed her mind the very first time one of ‘er brothers had a cold in his ‘ead — Joe were given to colds in the ‘ead, and he turned all ‘is N’s into D’s, and Neville don’t sound so well that way anyhow.”

“ Did she marry Mr. Neville ? ”

“ No, she could n’t never get over that cold in the ‘ead of Joe’s, and she married a man by the name of Smith, which ain’t in the peerage as I knows on. None on us thought much on ‘im, and as things ‘as turned out, we was n’t fur wrong ; but she would n’t listen to what folks said, she liked him and he liked ‘er, and that ‘s enough for ‘em in a general way, as you ‘ll find out some day, Missy. Her mother was terrible set against ‘im, and she talked and she talked, but lor ! as I tell her, she might quite as well ‘ave ‘eld ‘er tongue, but women can’t never learn to save their breath, and they

never seems to remember neither as they was just such another theirselves when they was young. So the missus just clacketed away from morning till night, and Ameliar she listened, but I knew by the look in her eye as it were n't a bit of good. So I were n't so much surprised when she come to me one night, after the missus was abed, and I smokin' my pipe as I might be now, and she says, quite quiet like, 'Dad,' says she (they called me 'Dad' when they was kids), 'me and Fred's going to be married to-morrow morning; we've been called at the church' (she knew as 'twere safe seeing we was Wesleyans when we was anything, and never went near the church), 'and he've took rooms for us in John Street.' 'Well,' says I, trying to speak indifferent like, as if I did n't care a snap, though she was my youngest and a pretty little piece, though I say it as should n't, and young too to think of marryin' right away from me and her ma — "

"How old?" with breathless interest.

"Why, she could n't abeen more'n eighteen. 'Well,' says I, 'you knows what your ma thinks on it.' 'Yes,' she says, 'time I knew that, as she ain't talked of nothing else for the last six months.' 'And I quite agrees with 'er,' says I. 'No, you don't,' she says, the little, impident hussy! coming

and kneelin' down and takin' my pipe right out of my mouth, 'no, you don't,' she says, 'and you're just a-goin' to wish me joy; and say, God bless yer, my dear.' "

There was a mist gathering in the old man's eyes, at the memory of the young daughter, changed many years since into a hard, toil-worn woman, with a worthless, idle husband to slave for, and an answering mist rose in Pen's. She was standing with the ironed dress laid over her arms, to carry it up without crumpling, and her hair was all in a tangled silken mass about her neck and shoulders, and the old man was raking out the fire.

He was full of those old times of which he had been talking, and he hardly noticed that Pen, the child as he called her in his mind, was lingering still.

"Good-night, Mr. Mangles," she said, "and thank you." And then, with a sudden impulse, coming nearer the old man, she added, "Will you say it to me too, as you did to your daughter, 'God bless you, my dear'?"

"Ay, ay! to be sure I will, with all my heart. God bless yer, my dear!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

WE agreed, I think, at the beginning of the last chapter, that the bridal dress is a subject of engrossing interest to brides of all degrees and in all circumstances ; but I am inclined to go further than that, and to maintain that the costume of the bridegroom is not altogether such a matter of indifference to him as he would wish it to be supposed.

Personal vanity had never been one of Sandy's besetting sins, for obvious reasons, perhaps unkind spectators might declare ; but I do not think that vanity is, as a rule, at all in proportion to the personal gifts that might justify it, but rather in the reverse ratio, and many a man with less personal attractions than Sandy has fancied himself an Apollo. Do not imagine from this that I am going to invest Sandy with all sorts of hitherto unmentioned gifts and graces, as is the manner of many writers of the present day, who introduce their heroes as ugly to an almost diabolical degree, and

their heroines as little, plain, uninteresting creatures, but, by the middle of the second volume, all this is changed ; the hero is, at any rate, a Hercules of strength, at least a head and shoulders taller than any one else in the book, has noble features and a commanding presence, and fine lines about his well-cut mouth ; while the heroine, it appears, has beautiful eyes and a wealth of golden hair, and a milk-white skin and a graceful figure, which in ordinary life would go far to make her a very striking individual, and which surely must have been apparent when she was first introduced to us as dowdy and plain.

It is certainly rather a temptation to make the best of Sandy at this juncture of my story ; it would be so much more interesting if I could make him a few years younger or less bony and awkward, or discover that his eyes were really blue instead of greenish yellow, or that his hair was any color except sandy red of a very harsh and stubbly quality ; but truth compels me to stick to my first description of him, and to represent him as he appeared to himself in the shop windows as he passed, or in the huge mirrors by which upholsterers try to take away any lingering remnant of self-complacency in the people who pass their shops.

Sandy had never been so painfully conscious of

his defects as he was that day—indeed he had hardly been conscious of them at all; he had been profoundly indifferent as to how he looked or what men and, still more, women thought of him,—the only people he cared about liked him quite as much in a shabby coat as in a new one,—but now he became sensitively conscious of his shabbiness and the want of fit in his clothes and, as I have said, took surveys of himself in the shop windows, with much dissatisfaction and vexation of spirit. He looked with envy at the young men he met—that wonderfully common type of young man to be met with by hundreds in the City, each exactly like the others, about five feet six in height, with a small, neat mustache, closely cropped hair, fresh complexion, clothes of precisely similar color and make, flower in button-hole, dogskin gloves, neatly rolled umbrella and small black bag. Talk of the difficulty of distinguishing individual sheep in a flock! it can be nothing to the attempt to identify a young man in London.

Sandy would have been only too glad to exchange his outward man with any of these; but it was quite out of the question trying to alter and become like them: he was altogether cast in a different and very much bigger mould, and, after investing in a new tie and pair of gloves, both of

which gave him unutterable dissatisfaction and which he resolved not to wear almost before they were paid for and crushed ruthlessly into his pocket, he gave up any idea of improvement in his personal appearance as hopeless, and turned into Covent Garden Market to order a bouquet of white flowers, with such an utter disregard for expense, that the young lady who took the order looked more than once into Sandy's freckled face to see if it were a joke, and, not seeing anything comic in his expression, felt strong suspicions that he was a swindler, till the money paid in advance convinced her of his honesty, when she ultimately labelled him in her mind as an American or a lunatic.

Little Pen's wedding was not by any means what it should have been, but, at any rate, she should have a bouquet fit for a royal bride. It was to be delivered at his lodgings by nine o'clock next morning without fail; a few shillings more to insure a punctual messenger was a trifle, and the young lady was still more perplexed by the address, at a little street in Dalston, and made Sandy repeat it many times over before she could be convinced that it was not some mistake. Before leaving Covent Garden Market he found his way to the outside part, frequented in the early morning,

where he and Pen had sat on the shafts of the wagon, — he with the dirty child in his arms, she with the basket of flowers, — and thought of the words she had said then, so simply and guilelessly — words which had lain dormant in his heart till they awoke to life and movement the night before.

In his pocket all this time lay a document from Archibald Campbell, by Divine Providence Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England and Metropolitan, graciously granting his License and Faculty for the marriage of “our well-beloved in Christ” Alexander Maclaren and Penelope Brand. There was something so wonderful and dreamlike in the affair, that he stopped more than once as he passed through the streets to feel that folded paper in his inside coat-pocket, and would have dearly liked to open it and look at the names therein recorded, if he could have found a quiet corner where he could do so unobserved.

The evening was closing in when he got back to Dalston. It was only a little more than twenty-four hours since he had turned the corner into Purton Street, after his four months’ absence, and had heard the strains of Mr. Mangles’ concertina rising from the kitchen window of No. 37; but it seemed almost as if it might be weeks, months,

even years ago ; he felt so utterly different, with altogether new prospects opening out before him, with new feelings beating and burning at his heart.

He had still to give notice at the church, and when he reached St. Martha's, a dull, little place of worship, built in the meagre style of fifty years ago, he found an old woman just closing the church after an evening service.

• She regarded him at first with some suspicion, perhaps as having designs on the almsboxes, which however, I am afraid, do not often contain enough to make them a strong temptation to burglars ; but when he explained his errand, she became more amiable, and allowed him to look into the dark church, and even to go along the aisle and stand for a moment in front of the altar, where he would stand so soon with little Pen. The only light in the church was from a solitary gas-jet burning in the entrance lobby, which threw a gigantic shadow of Sandy in front of him as he walked up the church, so that one elbow blotted out the reading-desk and the other the pulpit, while his head swallowed up the altar and the book-desk and cushion upon it, and the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer on either side, and the deadness of the colored window above.

He stood for just a moment in front of the altar, saying softly to himself, "For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part." And then the shrill, cracked voice of the old pew-opener sounded down the church from the west door, with that want of reverence that constant familiarity with sacred things so often engenders, "I'm just a-going to lock the doors if you're agreeable to come out," and Sandy retraced his steps up the aisle.

There must have been a lingering look of awe on Sandy's face, a little remnant of the brightness which does not fade immediately from the face of one who has been in the holy mount, and which is noticeable till he puts on the veil of conventionality, for the woman peered up at him with her weak, old eyes.

"It's a niceish kind of church, ain't it? since the pews was all repainted. If it weren't so terrible draughty of a winter, as my legs won't stand another such. Yes, sure! I won't forget—thankye kindly, sir, and many of 'em. I'm just a-going to Mr. Roach with the key; he's the clerk, sir, and I'll tell him at 'arf-past nine punkshal. Beggin' your parding, sir, maybe it's your daughter now as is going to be married? Make so bold, 'avin'

children of my own and knowin' what a parient's feelings is. Good-night and thankye, sir."

He had made up his mind not to go to No. 37 again that day, so he sent a note to Pen to say that he would come at nine next morning, and got a little boy to take it, while he stood at the corner of the street and watched him to make sure that it was delivered. He saw Mr. Mangles open the door and take the letter in, and then he passed once or twice in front of the house, where the only-light was in the kitchen window, the blind of which, however, prevented him from seeing the ironing going on within. His conclusion was that Pen was up in Tre's room at the back of the house, and even the most sentimental of lovers would hardly care to spend much time gazing at a blind, behind which the man in possession is smoking his pipe; and Sandy was conscious that he was tired, and that some supper would not come amiss.

Mrs. Jones's niece had nothing to complain of that night—indeed she quite regretted having "spoken short to the gentleman," and was afraid that it might be due to this his giving notice to leave the apartments, "though he spoke very nice, and said he would give a month's rent, as he had n't given proper notice, which was 'andsome, being a weekly lodger. He said as how he were

leaving town next day on business, and his compliments to Mrs. Jones, and he should remember how comfortable her rooms was, and recommend 'em to all his friends, and he give me a old ring as 'ad been his mother's, he says, with some pearls and some 'air in it, and he spoke so pleasant-like that really if he 'd been a-going to stay on a bit longer and aunt 'ad n't been comin' 'ome just yet,"— and here she bridled and patted the fringe on her forehead into more becoming confusion — "there 's no knowing what might have 'appened ! Though he ain't what you 'd call good-lookin', still he 's quite the gentleman and no mistake."

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE 'S MANY A SLIP.

IT was a lovely morning, even in London, even in Dalston, and the old proverb came into Sandy's head as he saw the sun on his blind when he woke in the morning — Happy is the bride that the sun shines on — and he smiled at the thought of what a child-bride his was, and resolved with all his heart that the sun should shine on little Pen, as far as he could influence it, all her life through, as well as on her wedding-day.

He managed to control his impatience till close upon nine o'clock, and then got into a fever at the flowers not arriving before the hour he had ordered them, blaming himself for idiotic stupidity for not having named an earlier hour for their delivery. He looked at his watch twenty times in a minute, he compared it with the kitchen clock, he leaned out of window to look down the street, he went to the corner to see if the flowers were coming and then hurried back, with the conviction that they had come the other way while his back was turned ;

ultimately he made up his mind that if they did not come by ten minutes past nine he would give them up and punish the deceptive keeper of the flower-shop with some dire vengeance to be invented hereafter, and sat grimly with his watch in his hand till the hands reached that time, when he went off in dire wrath and indignation, and had not left the house two minutes, before the boy arrived in a hansom, having been delayed by some misadventure which it is not worth inquiring into here.

Anyhow Sandy turned into Purton Street without the flowers, trying to smother his anger by reflecting that no one would be disappointed but himself, as no one but he knew they were coming.

But as he turned the corner the flowers and his anger went out of his head all of a sudden, and surprise first, and then consternation, took their place, for standing in front of No. 37 was a well-appointed carriage and a pair of sleek, glossy horses, round which was gathered a group of admiring ragamuffins from the neighboring streets.

The first impression conveyed to his mind was that it was one of Louis Brand's mad freaks of extravagance, and that he had hired the carriage

for the occasion ; but this idea only lasted for a moment, for nowhere in Dalston could such a carriage be hired, nor such handsome horses, let alone the pompous coachman on the box, and the footman who was conveying a cushion from the house to the carriage at that moment.

It was not the first time Sandy had seen that carriage standing there, though it had not been in Purton Street for more than four months. There was no mistaking Miss Percival's carriage.

He went on in a dazed way to the house, wondering by what fatality she had come there on that day ; if Louis Brand could have let her know what was intended, and she had come to protest against the marriage, as it was incredible that she could have come to give it the sanction of her presence.

The door was open, the footman having returned for something else after putting the cushion in the carriage, so Sandy went in, catching a glimpse of Mr. Mangles' face on the kitchen-stairs, grinning in high delight and satisfaction, and making unintelligible signals to Sandy as he passed in.

In the little parlor a strange scene met his view. The tall, long-coated footman was just lifting little Tre, wrapped in blankets, very carefully to carry

her out — lifting her from no other place than the lap of Miss Percival, in whose arms the child had been lying. Tre had been crying, there were tears still in her big eyes, but they were looking up in her aunt's face without the fear and aversion which Sandy remembered in them on that former occasion when the monkey had come to the window. Perhaps she was too weak and ill to protest, perhaps there was a look of mother in the aunt's face, which surely was softer and gentler than of old.

By the table Louis Brand stood, as unkempt and dilapidated-looking as the day before, but with a certain dignity about him that had been wanting then, a certain look of resolution and purpose that was a curious contrast to the pitiful weakness he had displayed yesterday.

And then there was Pen. Sandy would have said that he saw Pen first and Pen only in that room, and yet he had taken in all the rest, even to the expression each face showed. Pen wore a limp white muslin frock, and her face was nearly as colorless as her dress, and her eyes had a strained, terrified look, like a hunted deer, and turned to Sandy as he came in with an appeal in them, the memory of which wrung his heart for many a day to come. She made a movement as

if she would have come to him, but at that moment Miss Percival put her arm round the girl's slight figure.

"Pen," she said, and her voice sounded wonderfully like the dead mother's, "it is your father's wish you should come with me, and little Tre will want you. Your mother used to love me ; won't you try to love me too for her sake?"

She had drawn the girl's fair head to her shoulder, and the tender embrace and the mention of her mother's name opened the floodgates of Pen's tears, which had been closed in her aching young heart for many a sad day, and she clung sobbing there, with Miss Percival's arm round her and Miss Percival's cheek resting on the soft hair, while she whispered comforting words of love and tenderness.

It must have cost a reserved nature like Miss Percival's a great deal to express her feelings thus. It is a pain quite incomprehensible to more open, demonstrative natures for such an one to push aside the veil, with which she is used to shroud all her tenderer feelings, and especially when the veil has been undisturbed for a lifetime. But in proportion to the pain so is the effect on the hearer ; the words painfully uttered, few and stiff and halting though they may be, carry more weight than

endless, honey-sweet, glib eloquence from a more gushing nature. It is just like the reproof of a mistress who hates to find fault and who hurts herself with every severe word she says, and of whom one word does more than a hundred from a nagging mistress. I think Penelope Percival had learned as much in those four months of comfort and luxury and plenty and beauty at Highfield as Penelope Brand had in poverty and anxiety and scarcity and meanness in Purton Street.

Miss Percival was speaking to Louis Brand now. "Believe me," she said, "I am very grateful to you for trusting your children to me. I will do my best to be a mother to them."

He only bowed his head in answer to this, and she went on: "I want to ask your pardon for my words when I was last here: I was inconsiderate — I did not mean —"

"It is of no consequence."

"I want you to understand," she went on, and her voice trembled, "that at any time you like to come and see the children, you will be welcome at Highfield."

He smiled.

"Most welcome," she repeated.

"Thank you," he answered, "I do not think I shall be able to come."

"Not now, perhaps," she urged, "but soon you will want to see them."

"I think not."

"I am afraid," she continued nervously, with a hesitation quite unlike her usual composure, and with a glance round the shabby, little room, "that you are in difficulties. If you will allow me —"

"No," he interrupted a little sharply. "I do not require help."

"Louis Brand," she said, and she stretched out her hand, still holding Pen with the other, "will you shake hands and let us part friends?"

He smiled again, that dreary sort of smile, and took his hand lingeringly out of the pocket of his velveteen coat. "If you care about it," he said. "Oh, yes; we may as well part friends."

He turned away after that to the fireplace and kept arranging the spills on the mantelpiece, as if the completion of a design were the principal matter in hand at present, while Miss Percival put a cloak round Pen, who seemed quite stupefied and hardly conscious what was done to her, while Sandy stood looking on in a sort of mazed dream.

"Will you bid them good-by?" Miss Percival said; but Louis Brand only gave a motion of refusal with his hand, and devoted himself with closer attention to that pattern of stars and dia-

monds he was arranging with the spills. And then Sandy drew back in the passage out of the way, and Miss Percival led little Pen out, with never a look or word or sign to him who might have been standing at that very moment before the altar, taking her for his wedded wife.

When the sound of the horses' feet had died away, taking away Pen and Tre, as it almost seemed, into another world, Sandy recovered from the torpor into which he had fallen.

"What does it mean?" he asked, laying his hand on Louis Brand's shoulder and speaking in a thick, hoarse voice. "I don't understand. How did it come about?"

"I telegraphed to Miss Percival yesterday afternoon to come at once."

"But did n't you understand?"

"Yes, I understood from what you said that I was unfit to take care of the children any longer, and I quite agreed with you."

His voice was quite calm and steady, but when he turned to face Sandy he was deadly pale, and his face was working with an emotion that was terrible to see.

"Look here, Maclaren," he said, "let us have it out at once, for I don't mean to mention their names again as long as I live. I have given over

the children to their aunt, and I never will see or hear of them again. It is done once for all."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Go to the devil as fast as possible. Ah, you think, I dare say, that I was going that way fast enough already, but I tell you, as long as the children were with me there was always a chance for me. I have been going down hill, but, I do believe, it was n't hopeless. I might have pulled up, I might have got square again for the children's sake, and for the sake of meeting her again. I tell you, Maclaren, when she died it was not like parting forever as it is to-day."

"Why did you let the children go, then?"

"Why? Do you think if any harm had come to the children, through my fault, I could have dared to meet her? even if the angel held open the gate and there was all the peace and happiness and rest and beauty they say there is up there? Do you think if she had said 'Where are my little girls?' and I could not answer, it would be heaven to me even by her side? I tell you, Maclaren, the worst torments could not be so bad as that, and hell fire itself would have its drop of comfort, if I could lift up my eyes and see her with the children safe and together. It's safest and best and happiest for the children to go to Highfield, and I

think," he said with a forlorn sort of smile, "that the poor chance of such a miserable creature as I am keeping straight is not to be weighed against that. She gave up a lot for me. After all it's not much I am doing for her."

"Was there no other way?" Sandy asked, thinking of that other way he had planned, of the marriage license in his pocket, of the bridal bouquet that was no doubt at his lodgings by this time, of the clergyman tired of waiting for the bridal party that would never come.

"No. I would have told you what I intended, but you had gone before I had quite brought my mind to it."

"You must not lose sight of the children."

"Don't think I am going to do it by halves. Don't think I shall change my mind and hang on to them, and be pensioned off, and be a trouble and shame and disgrace to them. No, I will never see or write to them, or, if I can help it, hear of them again, gentle little Pen! merry little Tre! They are as dead to me as their mother is, and I will never see them again, till, if such wonderful grace is given to lost souls, I may see them with their mother across the great gulf."

Then the two men sat silent in the room that contained so many marks of the children's pres-

ence, with Pen's work-basket on the table and Tre's doll at the end of the sofa. All the house was so quiet, as if there might be death in it. Mr. Mangles even swallowed his whistling and moved about on tiptoe.

In the afternoon the broker's men came in and carted off the furniture ; and, by the evening train, two passengers travelled down to Monkton-on-Sea, one of them carrying a bouquet of such choice beauty, that many turned to look at and admire it.

"It is a bride's bouquet !" they said, "he is taking it to a wedding ;" but they were wrong, for he was taking it to lay upon a grave.

CHAPTER XVII.

YOUNG TOM.

L UCKHAM DENE was the house upon which Tom Maclaren ultimately settled, after much painful indecision and wearisome visiting of eligible freehold properties, and sickening perusings of house-agents' lists and advertisements. He was in that perplexing position of having no one to please but himself and young Tom, having no ties to one place more than another, and having the world before him from which to select his place of residence, and with no lack of means to restrict his choice. This is a truly pitiable condition to be placed in, and frequently ends in the person so circumstanced never settling on any place at all, but remaining for the rest of his life in furnished apartments.

But after a couple of years of looking about and listening to people's advice, he declared that he would take whatever place turned up next, as anything was better than further uncertainty. And, luckily for him, Luckham Dene chanced to be

recommended to his notice, and Luckham Dene seemed as if it must have been built specially for old and young Tom. It was a long white house, with plenty of windows, those on the ground floor opening into a wide veranda, which ran round two sides of the place, and which was covered with roses and clematis, such a pleasant place to sit and smoke on a hot summer evening, in one of those great, deep, softly cushioned chairs, and to look across the tennis lawn to the meadow, where the mild-eyed Alderney cows grazed, and which sloped gently down to a piece of water, through which a lazy, little stream finds its way, stirring the long branches of the willows and the broad lily-leaves, and, after meandering through meadows and copses, falls a mile or so farther into the Thames. And beyond the water were pastures and cornfields undulating up and down, in a manner delightful to eyes that were accustomed to the dreary, flat monotony of the country round Shanghai, and groups of elm-trees, between which you could get a further view of distant blue hills. It was that peaceful bit of landscape that settled Tom Maclaren to take the house, the quiet and the greenness of it; and you must live abroad for half your lifetime to fully appreciate this latter quality.

Inside the house there were plenty of rooms,

small enough to be snug, big enough to be airy. Billiard-room, dining-room, library, drawing-room opening into conservatory. I seem to be describing it just like those house-agents' lists of which Tom got so weary, and I shall find myself, unless I pull up, giving the dimensions of the rooms, and entering into details about the offices, and speaking of it as a commodious family mansion. There were gardens and orchards and stables, and plenty of shooting to be had, and it was only thirty miles from London, and there was a station not a mile off — though, happily for Tom's peaceful landscape, the line did not cross it, to break the charm by a sudden puff of smoke, or a bustling, little train in the distance.

It was the sort of place where you could live pretty much as you liked ; it did not entail the necessity of keeping a retinue of servants and living in state ; it did not "take two men to open the door," a remark which was made to me once by an old lady in describing her son's house, and which, in the innocence of my heart, I took to mean the actual heaviness of the door, and wondered, with carpenters and joiners so easily to be procured, that some easier means of egress might not be devised, but I think I know now what she meant. Certainly the door at Luckham Dene

could be opened with ease, even by a neat-looking parlor-maid. Neither was a French cook and elaborate *menu* compulsory; you might sit down in the snug, little dining-room, or have your table spread in the veranda, and have a chop, without feeling ashamed of yourself; and yet there was room for a few friends if you asked them to dinner, and the neighboring squires liked Tom Maclaren's little dinners better than the solemn feeds which the country gentry round were in the habit of giving, with a pompous display of family plate and flunkies.

He found the life a little bit dull at first, while young Tom was at Cambridge, till he had lighted on an old China friend settled in the neighborhood, and made a few congenial new ones, and had got interested in his little farm. He had always reckoned on Sandy's company, but in this he was disappointed. It was most remarkable, he used to complain, that his brother Sandy should have been suddenly attacked with a roving mania just when he and young Tom had come home from China, with a wish to settle down and forget all about foreign parts. All the years they were out at Shanghai Sandy stuck to London like a limpet to a rock; why! he had never been outside this precious, little island till he came over to Brindisi, and then on to

Port Said to meet them, and he was in a perfect fever to get back again all the time young Tom was ill, and would hardly give himself time to recover at Grindelwald, so anxious was he, for some reason or other, to get back to London, though he had resigned his situation at Jones, Richardson & Co.'s some time before, so it had nothing to do with them.

It had always been understood that they should have quarters together, and they would have been company for one another while young Tom was away. But though Sandy looked out comfortable rooms for his brother and young Tom when they came up to London, he altogether declined to share them, and could only be persuaded to come occasionally on very short visits, during the two years they were in London, and still more seldom when they went down to Luckham Dene.

There was some friend of his, a queer sort of fellow, an artist, who never showed up, and who, as far as Tom could make out, was a disreputable kind of customer, and yet he seemed to have a sort of fascination for Sandy, who was restless and fidgety if they were many days apart. Tom fancied there might be some daughter or sister to account for Sandy's infatuation about this Louis Brand. "There's generally a woman at the bottom of that

sort of thing," he used to say, with that knowing look with which people generally make that remark, as if they were the very first to do so. It is not such a very clever remark, after all, if you come to think of it. Considering that there are but the two sexes, and decidedly more women than men in England, the chances are very much in favor of a woman being concerned in most matters, and it does not require great acuteness to see it. But, as it turned out, this Louis Brand did not seem to have any womankind belonging to him, so it must have been pure friendship that kept Sandy dancing attendance on him.

Old Tom had never seen him, though he had repeatedly begged Sandy to bring him down to Luckham Dene, which invitations had been always declined. But young Tom, in spite of Sandy's opposition, managed to get a sight of him, and described him as a disreputable, out-of-elbows sort of man, looking wretchedly ill and miserable, and with nothing attractive or amusing about him.

"Cognac?" asked old Tom, in answer to a significant movement of his son.

"Yes, and worse," was the answer, "opium, if I'm not mistaken."

And old Tom, who had seen enough of it among

the Chinese, shook his head. "Ah! then he's done for, poor chap!"

Tom Maclaren thought his brother a little bit cracked on the subject of Louis Brand; but he maintained that Sandy had never quite got over that illness he had abroad, he was quite another man after that, and never seemed to pick up his spirit or have any life in him, and he got to look a lot older and grayer.

"When we met him first at Alexandria he looked years younger than I did; I had lost my hair and had had more than one touch of liver, which ages a man; but now, by Jove! Tom, I think I look the younger of the two."

"Younger, sir? I should rather think so! Why, Lucas of John's asked if my *brother* was still up. They'll be taking you for my son next."

Young Tom and Sandy were still very good friends, and the lad tried vainly to re-establish the tyranny which he had begun during Sandy's illness; but there was a change somehow which he could not quite make out, and this tiresome Louis Brand seemed to come in between them, whenever the old terms were likely to be renewed. By and by, when Tom had had a term or two at Cambridge, and had plenty of friends, it did not matter to him so much, and he took it for granted that Sandy

would be off somewhere with Louis Brand, down in Dorsetshire, in some-out-of-the-way fishing-village, or in Jersey, or the south of France, or in some village right away in the heart of the Ardennes, and his absences grew longer and longer, till at last neither old nor young Tom counted on Sandy as any part of their every-day life.

And now ten years have passed since that August day, when a bridal bouquet was laid on Mrs. Brand's grave at Up-Monkton : not quite ten years, for it is June, and the grass is long in the meadow beyond the tennis lawn at Luckham Dene, swaying and billowing as the evening air passes over it. This chapter indeed is only the interlude between the two acts in my drama, and would be despatched on the play-bill in a few words — "An interval of ten years has elapsed between the acts," and all the rest be left to the scene-shifters ; and the incidents of those ten years be picked up from the opening dialogue, and from the change in the appearance of the actors, So-and-So having a gray wig, somebody else wrinkles, or a red nose, and look ! the little tree they planted has grown up above the actors' heads.

But I cannot quite leave the occurrences of those ten years to be gathered by the reader from

the conversation of young and old Tom, as they sit in the veranda smoking that June evening. In every-day life people do not introduce the events of the last few years casually into their ordinary talk ; indeed, they are apt to converse more about the events of the last few hours, or minutes even, living, as we all do, so much in the all-powerful Present.

Neither is Nature to be trusted as a property-man or stage-manager, to work all the outward signs of a lapse of time on the persons or scene ; she will powder the hair of one, or provide a well-constructed bald head, or paint wrinkles with the heaviest of hare's feet, and let another appear in the second act as smooth-faced and dark-haired as in the first ; and as for that little tree, why, it is a little tree still, through some mistake in the soil or the planting, or some mystery of root or sap undreamed of in the philosophy of play-writers or scene-painters.

Old Tom, as we have seen, looked distinctly younger, and as for young Tom, he hardly appeared sufficiently in the first act to impress the reader with the change that the ten years have worked in him. I think Mrs. Tom Maclaren must have been very charming, for I cannot believe that young Tom got his charm of manner

from the Maclaren side of the family. He got his dark eyes from her too, and old Tom thought him quite a young Apollo. I do not suppose he was quite that, though I do not fancy that Apollo, in flannels and a blazer, would look very much above the average of healthy, happy, young Englishmen ; but Tom was certainly a good-looking, young fellow, and had a taking way with him that most men liked, and all girls.

His flirtations used to give his father great uneasiness, and at times old Tom would remonstrate very seriously, but was always brought to confusion by the tables being turned on himself, and similar accusations laid to his charge, for, be it remembered, though we call him old Tom by way of distinguishing between the two, he was by no means an old man, in spite of his bald head and somewhat enlarged waistcoat ; and many a dame, ay, and damsel too, looked kindly at the widower, and pitied his forlorn condition, and thought that young Tom needed a mother's guidance, and the Dene a mistress.

Young Tom declared he would have his father made a ward in Chancery, to save him from the designing attentions of the other sex, who were always trying to betray his innocence ; but really he knew well enough that there was no danger at

all of his ever having a stepmother, or perhaps he would not have been so ready to joke about it.

But of late years, since Tom left Cambridge, his father had begun to wish that one or other of these flirtations of his son's should turn out something more serious than the butterfly fancies that succeeded one another so rapidly; that one of those nice, pretty girls who smiled so sweetly on young Tom's attentions, should smile her way deeper into his heart, and reign there, and come as young Mrs. Tom to be the mistress of Luckham Dene — only she must be something specially sweet and good and pretty and nice to be worthy of young Tom.

This very June evening, as young Tom lay back in his chair, with his cigar pointed almost straight up at the roof of the veranda, and his racket swinging still in one hand, he was describing a little girl he had been playing tennis with all the afternoon, till old Tom began to consider if this might be the one or if it were only the fiftieth.

Young Tom was still in his tennis flannels, and, in the almost horizontal position in which he lay, the only part of him which met his father's eye was the soles of his tennis shoes with their gray ribbed surface, from which it would be difficult to judge the depth of an impression produced on a heart about five feet farther off.

"A jolly, little girl, plays tennis awfully well. You should have seen some of her strokes. I really haven't seen anything so pretty as her serving for a long time. I hope she 'll be at the Lesters' on Saturday."

And then he relapsed into silence, so unusual with young Tom that his father felt still more impressed with the idea that this was something more serious than former admirations, and wondered what was before his mind's eye as he lay with half-shut eyes looking up into the veranda.

And while old Tom can only wonder, we can take a look and see a slight, fair girl in tennis dress with a racket in her hand. Her hair has been disordered in the play, and the heavy plaits have fallen from their coil on to her shoulder and are untwisting themselves into long, soft strands of silky fineness.

Surely, surely, we have seen that little, delicate face before, and those great, clear eyes, only there is a tinge of sweet, healthy color on the cheeks and brightness and laughter in the eyes, only that the tennis dress is dainty and prettily made and more becoming than a rusty, shabby, black frock, and the little hand grasps a racket instead of a flat-iron.

Ah ! here is a mistake of the property-man or

stage-manager with a vengeance. Pen was fifteen ten years ago, in Purton Street ; she ought to be five-and-twenty now, and the little tennis-player cannot be more than sixteen all told. That would have been a mistake indeed, but the little girl that young Tom sees before him, up there in the veranda, near the swallow's nest, is not Pen but Tre, and she is sixteen to-morrow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SANDY'S RETURN.

IT was that very evening that Sandy made his appearance at Luckham Dene, walking up from the station, carrying his bag, and coming round the house into the veranda, as if it were only the other day he had left them, and not eighteen months before, when he had come for his usual two days' visit.

I do not think we need find fault with Sandy's make-up for his reappearance on the scene after the ten years' interval. If anything, I think Nature had overdone the markings of age. There was a considerable sprinkling of gray in his hair — Cayenne pepper and salt young Tom described it — he was thinner too, and had more lines and marks in his face than time was altogether accountable for, and a sort of patient look, as of one who had nothing to expect or hope for.

There was the usual hearty welcome from the two Toms, and the hurrying up of supper, and the getting ready of his room, and the getting out of

some particular sort of wine, and the cheerful talk, and the two colliers coming up to rub against him and put silken heads on his knee. Then after supper there were various small alterations to be shown, "If you 're not tired, and it 's not too dark," and the prospects of the hay-making to be discussed, and pacing up and down the garden walks and leaning over the meadow gate, with the quiet and fragrance of the midsummer night round them, with the orange of the sunset hardly faded from the west, and a few bright stars overhead, and soft noises from the long grass in front, the chirp of the grasshoppers and the whir of a cockchafer and the flutter of a bird disturbed in the bushes near. When they came back to the veranda, the lamp had been lighted, round which the moths fluttered and knocked, and young Tom was flicking with his handkerchief at a ghastly, noiseless bat, who flitted backwards and forwards in a weird, uncanny way.

It was not till they were going to bed that old Tom remembered to ask after Louis Brand.

"Well, and how 's Brand?"

And Sandy answered, "All right," and then added quickly, "I mean he died last week at Monkton."

"That 's a good" — and then old Tom be-

thought himself, and tried to cover his words with a cough; but Sandy quickly took up his remark and finished it. "Yes, it's a good job, poor fellow!" and old Tom grumbled out some inarticulate expressions of condolence of a singularly inappropriate description, and hastily said "Good-night" and took himself off.

"Yes!" Sandy repeated to himself more than once, "it is a good job!" and yet he felt an emptiness, a want that belied his words, an aching feeling that his occupation and interest in life had gone, and that it would be a good job when his life was over too, since it had lost all object and purpose, and no one wanted him.

It is not by any means the best people that we miss the most, nor always the dearest that we most mourn; it is the cessation of an engrossing care that leaves us with the greatest sense of loss. And during those ten years Louis Brand had been Sandy's care, growing heavier year by year — a hopeless, dreary sort of business, with constant, ineffectual attempts to stop the downhill progress, and to rouse him to some effort to pull himself together and make a fresh start. I think any one but Sandy would have given it up in despair long since — in fact, I do not think many would have taken it in hand at all, seeing that there was no

obligation of relationship or bond of any sort between them, except that desultory sort of friendship, the advantages of which had been entirely one-sided. I think most men would have asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" — this weak, worthless, disreputable brother — and would not have felt the least bit like Cain when they asked it. It was patent to the priests and Levites at a glance that this poor wretch was mortally wounded, much more than half dead, oil and wine would be wasted on him, it might even hasten his end; it was kinder to let him alone and pass by on the other side.

But perhaps you may think that it was for Pen's sake that Sandy stuck to Louis Brand, and perhaps you are right. But not in any way as a link that might bring them together again; for during those ten years her name was never once mentioned till the very last day of Louis Brand's life. He was weak enough in other things, he was strong in this resolute silence; even when his mind was not under his own control, Sandy listened in vain for the sound of the children's names. He never wrote to them, he never heard from them, he took elaborate precautions to cut off any chance of their finding him out; when he left London, he left no address, he would give no clew to his whereabouts,

he did not know whether they were alive or dead, whether they were happy or unhappy. If they ever tried to find him it was in vain; and that they did make such efforts Sandy knew, for more than once he saw advertisements in the papers, entreating Louis Brand to communicate with his daughters, and he took care that Louis Brand should see these advertisements, but he made no remark.

At any rate, there were daughters. Little Tre had got better, Pen was still living, and they were free to try and find their father, so they were not in utter bondage.

During those ten years Sandy had had plenty of time to think over those two days which had begun, or at any rate developed his romance so suddenly, and still more suddenly closed it; but he never altered in the feeling that had forced itself on his unwilling heart as he stood at the door of the little parlor in Purton Street, a silent but terribly interested spectator of the scene taking place there. It was quite right, it was a thousand times better for little Pen, it was altogether a desperate expedient that he had devised, not to be thought of if any other way offered. Great as his love for her might be and was, he could not provide against all the deadly risks that might have

assailed her happiness in after years. She was such a child, young even for her years ; as time went on memory painted her to him as almost more childish than she really was, and he used to laugh in a miserable sort of way at the ludicrous idea of marrying such a baby ; it really would have been quite comic, if it had not been so exquisitely painful, and he thought he must have been out of his mind when he seriously contemplated such a thing.

Sometimes, indeed, the remembrance of her face came back to him, as she stood that morning in her limp white muslin, and looked at him with great, appealing eyes, that were not quite child's eyes, that spoke of something stronger than childish grief ; but he drove the thought away with self-contempt at his own folly in imagining such things, and forced himself to fancy a child's sorrow easily comforted and a child's mind distracted by new scenes and brighter surroundings.

"Why on earth should you bother yourself about me?" Louis Brand used to say, in his intervals of compunction, for as a rule Sandy got but little thanks for the trouble he took for his friend, which generally was treated as impertinent interference and unwarrantable dictation. "Why don't you go off to your brother? I can do well enough."

But Sandy was not to be persuaded to leave him, any more than he was to be driven away by the irritable abuse and miserable ingratitude that were the usual return for all his patient, unwearying kindness.

Towards the end, when mind and body were failing with Louis Brand, Sandy nursed him night and day like a child, and it was on Sandy's patient arm that Louis Brand's head sunk back in its last sleep, and into his kind face, haggard with watching, that the dying eyes looked up, with the sudden brightening that comes sometimes before the flame dies out.

"Pen!" he said, "Tre! where are you? Sandy, tell the children their mother wants them."

And then Sandy laid him gently down, and, turning to the window, drew back the blind and looked out on the same scene that had lain before his eyes ten years before, the morning after Mrs. Brand's funeral, the daily miracle of the sun rising over the great and wide sea, telling of a mercy yet more great and wide, and of a love new every morning and as beautiful as if never before had "God so loved the world."

"Leave him alone," old Tom said to his son in those first days of Sandy's return to Luckham Dene, when the young man fidgeted over the list-

less depression that seemed to have fallen over his uncle, and wanted to rouse him and cheer him up and hunt him out of the blues. "Let him alone, he's out of sorts, body and mind. He's had a benefit with that friend of his, though he won't say a word against him. Give him plenty of good tobacco, and let him talk when he's inclined, and hold his tongue when he's not, and don't bother him, and he'll soon come round."

And I think old Tom's prescription was a very sensible one, and might with advantage be adopted in some cases by the faculty; for, I believe, that Sandy smoked away a good deal of the heart-sickness and weariness that oppressed him, as he sat in the deep chair in the veranda, with his long legs stretched out, and the lovely silence lapping him round — midsummer silence that is made up of sounds, if you come to analyze it — a bird's chirp, a gnat's drowsy hum, a cock crowing in some distant farmyard, the trot of a horse on some unseen road, the pleasant sound of the scythe sharpened on the hone, the clink of the hammer in the village smithy, and a dozen other sounds, which you can disentangle from what, at first, you would call silence.

I think the dogs were a help to his recovery too. Colin and Rob, the two collies, looked at him from

the first with eyes full of sympathy, and pushed soft noses into his hand, or pottered about the garden paths after him, and treated him gently and with consideration, instead of bouncing and barking and prancing about, as they did with young Tom; and Rob had a way of coming and rearing himself up and putting his forefeet on the arm of Sandy's chair and looking down on him with wistful eyes that almost spoke—though how should a dog know that, if only he could have spoken, he could have told something that would have roused Sandy effectually from the apathy into which he was sunk? For those silken ears of Rob's had been stroked and gently pulled by no other hand than Pen's not many hours before, when she and young Tom had been sitting together under the cedars at Mrs. Lester's garden-party, discussing strawberries and cream, and getting on so well together that old Tom, who looked in just for a few minutes at the end, and who naturally concluded that this was the same little girl Tom had described so enthusiastically a few days before, came away confirmed in the belief that, after Tom's many flirtations, this was a serious affair at last.

“And, by Jove!” he said to Sandy when he got home, “I don't wonder at his taste; she's ex-

actly the sort of girl I should like him to marry if she's half as sweet as she looks."

But he did not mention, and indeed he did not know, that the name of this very suitable wife for Tom was Penelope Brand.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOING COURTING.

IT was three weeks after Sandy had come to Luckham Dene, and he was pretty well himself again, when, one Sunday afternoon, young Tom proposed that they should go over to service at Highfield church, just the other side of Warford.

“It is a goodish step,” he said, “but I feel as if I wanted to stretch my legs a bit, and it’s not too hot to-day for a walk, and we can go across the fields most of the way.”

The name of Highfield did not strike on Sandy’s ear, and, if it had, I doubt if it would have awakened any memories in his mind; but Tom’s elaborate excuses and reasons for taking the walk attracted his father’s attention, and he winked across the luncheon-table at Sandy in a meaning manner.

“It’s a long three miles,” he said, “and there are half a dozen churches nearer, and I don’t know how it is you have grown so devout all of a sudden. Once a day is more than enough church-going in a

general way. Why don't you go down to the river if you want a walk? Your uncle has not seen that bit by the lock, which to my mind is the prettiest all up the river."

"Oh, yes, it's awfully pretty; we'll go there another time; but I want to see the keeper over at Highfield about that retriever of mine, Shot; he's not a bit the thing."

"Oh, that keeper you said was a regular muff and did n't know a dog from a cat, eh?"

Young Tom looked a bit put out, till he caught the twinkle in his father's eye.

"Oh, yes!" he said, "the long and the short of it is I want to go up to the House and see how they're getting along. You've no objection, Sir?"

He looked so honest and manly and open as he spoke, with just a little tinge of red coming into his face and a touch of shamefacedness in his expression, that Sandy, who, after those two days of being an actor, had resumed his old part of spectator of other people's comedies and tragedies, as he watched the little scene between father and son, thought to himself that any girl might welcome the wooing of such a suitor as this, and that it was no wonder old Tom beamed across the cold lamb and salad, with quite the expression of the heavy father in the play, and as if "Bless you, my

children" might be his next remark, instead of "Pass the mint sauce."

Do you know, reader, how old Hodge leaning on the pigsty gate, in his Sunday shirt-sleeves, smoking his Sunday pipe, watches Joe or Jimmy or Bob setting off courting Jessy or Polly up at the farm on a Sunday afternoon? and how sheepish the young fellow looks as he fastens a bit of sweet-william and southernwood in his button-hole and cocks his hat a little on one side, over his well-greased locks, and sticks his cane jauntily under his arm? Old Hodge grins from ear to ear and there is a warm feeling in his heart for the lad, much the same feeling, though he could not put it into words, as an Emperor might feel when the Crown prince goes off to visit a foreign court, where some suitable royal highness resides, or as the Duke feels shortly before the "Morning Post" announces that a marriage has been arranged between the Marquis of Something and Lady So and So, though Hodge's feeling may be accounted purer, being uninfluenced by state or public policy or, as a general rule, by any considerations of prudence or suitability.

Old Tom may be considered as a cut between the Emperor and Hodge; he was not in his shirt-sleeves, though he had taken off his Sunday, go-to-

meeting coat with much satisfaction, and put on a loose shooting-coat in preparation for a dozy afternoon in the veranda, and I would not undertake to say that, at some period of the day, he would not visit his pigsties and bestow some consideration on his sleek, young porkers; but, when Sandy and young Tom set out on their walk, he had not yet betaken himself to the farmyard, but watched their departure from a more fragrant situation, under the Maréchal Niel rose-tree, from which young Tom had just selected a half-open rosebud for his button-hole, in place of the sweet-william and southernwood of his brothers starting on a similar quest. Tom's face was not shiny with soap-and-water like Joe's, nor his hair so well oiled, but he had that fresh, pleasant, well-turned-out look that young Englishmen have, the sort of look that Sandy had envied so much one afternoon, ten years before, when he had gone to get a marriage license and a bridal bouquet.

"I'm glad you're going," old Tom said to Sandy while young Tom was giving a final brush to his hat before starting. "I should like to have your opinion of the girl. To my mind, she's the nicest girl I've seen for a long time."

So Sandy and Tom set out on their walk, and though Tom had declared that it was not hot and

that most of the way lay across fields, there was enough dusty road and sunny paths across corn-fields, where the hot air shook and quivered above the yellowing grain and scarlet poppies, and through broad meadows, still showing the mark of the scythe and the wheel-tracks of the wagons that had carried off the hay a week ago, to make them glad to turn into the beech-wood, through which the path leads down to Highfield church.

"The bells have n't begun yet," said Tom, "so we can take it easy," and he began flicking the dust off his boots, while Sandy sat down on a stump to rest and cool. There was a pretty, little peep from where he sat of the church and churchyard, a brick tower covered with a wealth of glossy ivy and a large porch, on the tiles of which were soft colorings of moss and lichen and shadows from the big yew-tree. The churchyard was grassy and green, not trimly kept like a garden like the one where Louis Brand sleeps "after life's fitful fever," but pleasant and restful, with many unnamed mounds and broad elm-tree shadows.

Other paths led through the beech-wood down to the village, and along these, from time to time, as Sandy sat there and Tom leant against the smooth stem of the beech-tree near, various groups

passed on their way to the church or village, old men in the green smocks fast becoming extinct among the English peasantry, except in very remote regions ; children in smart hats, whose parents without regard for consequences had provided black-currant pudding for dinner ; neat, little friendly girls, with demure unconsciousness of the troop of lads coming up behind ; one or two examples of the Joe and Jessie genus, sheepish and red-faced, walking out of step and silent ; and then Sandy became aware that Tom had roused himself into a position of expectancy, and was settling his collar, which is very generally the part affected by excitement or agitation, and was looking up the mossy path, down which was coming, between the smooth gray trunks of the beech-trees, and with the soft lights and shadows from the foliage overhead dappling her white dress, a tall girlish figure.

All in white ! There was something that struck Sandy as beautiful and appropriate in Tom's lady-love coming in such simple purity and sweet unconsciousness along the woodland path to where her young lover waited at the junction of the paths. It was a happy omen too, Sandy thought, that just at that very moment the sweet, mellow old bells rang out from the church below, the bells that per-

haps before very long might ring a wedding-peal for the two that were meeting now in the beech-wood, he with a glad *empressement* that Sandy felt must be very winning, she with a certain serious composure and quiet self-possession that struck Sandy as not quite what he expected ; but then what experience had he in the manners of young ladies used to the ways of society?

Tom had gone a few paces up the path to meet her, and now they were coming, side by side, talking, and Sandy got up from his seat on the stump and straightened himself up for the introduction, a little bit stiff in the back, a touch of rheumatism, he told himself. And then, all of a sudden, a pair of clear, serious eyes were looking at him, eyes that suddenly as they looked changed to surprise and joy and unspeakable delight, and in a moment the midsummer beech-wood, with its lights and shadows, and young Tom's smiling introduction, and the soft clamor of the bells, and the stately maiden dressed in white, disappeared and vanished, and in its place was the dingy landing at Purton Street, with its torn carpet and broken banister, and shabby, little Pen with her rusty frock and pale face was there, and her hands were in his again. Hark ! don't you hear the swish-swish of the knife-cleaning and Mr. Mangles' whistling? and don't

you see how the paint is knocked off the hand-rail and that bit of torn paper on the wall?

He heard himself saying, "Pen! why, little Pen!" in an odd, gasping way, and she answered, "Sandy! oh! Sandy!" in a dim, far-away voice; but then, of course, a voice sounding through ten long empty years must needs be dim and far-away; and he was conscious too of young Tom, with rather an odd, puzzled, and not over-pleased look, picking up a parasol and prayer-book that had somehow dropped on the moss; but that was an odd, incongruous mixture in this dream, for what had young Tom got to do with little Pen? and how could moss come to be growing so green and fresh on the frowsy landing at Purton Street?

It could only have been a couple of seconds that the dream and confusion lasted, and it was Tom's voice that brought him round and pulled him together.

"Why, Sandy!" he was saying — for this disrespectful nephew had long thrown aside the prefix in addressing his uncle — "why! Sandy, I had no idea you and Miss Brand were old friends."

And then Sandy let go of two little hands in pearl-gray gloves, that he was grasping in a decidedly unconventional manner, and stammered out something about having known her long ago.

Pen recovered her outward self-possession before he did, though after the rush of bright color that came into her face at the first recognition she had turned very pale, and her hand shook as she took back her parasol from Tom, and her lip quivered and her voice was not quite manageable as she said, "It was such a surprise! such a surprise!" And then she added, with a little tremble in her voice as if a sob were not far off, "We had better go into church; the bells have changed — and afterwards — you will come and see my aunt, won't you? — and tell me —"

And then she led the way down the path towards the church, with young Tom at her side, and Sandy following in a dull sort of dream, hardly believing that it could be real, and that it was really little Pen's soft skirt, that swept the path just before him, the moss of which had hardly recovered from the pressure of her light foot when his crushed it down.

As they entered the porch, where a group of hobbledehoys waited till the service was well begun, before they went clattering in on hobnailed shoes, as is the mysterious custom of their kind, Pen asked, "My father?" and he showed her the band on his hat, and she passed into the quiet little church and led the way up to the Highfield seat,

which, though it has been shorn of its high sides and door and green curtains, still maintains its place in the chancel, to the pain and grief of the new vicar, who has modernized all the rest of the church, and has a choir of little, cat-voiced ploughboys in surplices, who are much limited for space in consequence of the Squire's seat.

All around, wherever Sandy's eye rested, were reminders of Percivals past and present, prayer-books on the desk bearing the Percival crest and motto, tablets on the walls recording the names and virtues of departed Percivals, one of whom lay extended in marble, with a substantial angel at his head, and at his feet a skeleton Death, holding up an hour-glass in his bony hand, while farther off a cavalier Percival, clad in armor, knelt in prayer, facing a beruffed and beringleted wife, and with a procession of quaint, little children kneeling behind them, many of them decapitated. There were hatchments too, and a brass plate under the window opposite the Percival seat made known that it had been placed there to the memory of Colonel Philip Percival, who departed this life in October, five years before, which was the first intimation Sandy had received of the death of the children's grandfather.

It was wisely done of Pen to suggest that they

should go into church, though there was still a quarter of an hour before the service began : they all three wanted time to think and get accustomed to the new aspect of things. Of course this was most the case with Pen herself and Sandy, but even Tom had something to reflect upon and realize, and there was an odd little, half-rueful twist of his mouth under the mustache, that might have amused a spectator if such there had been. He had been so entirely the hero of the occasion up to ten minutes ago and now he was simply nowhere ; and then it was a revelation, and not altogether a pleasant one, that this graceful, aristocratic-looking girl, who had the character with most fellows (though he could not say he had suffered from it) of being proud and a trifle haughty, for which people accounted by talking of the blue blood of the Percivals and their long pedigree, should be the daughter of that Louis Brand — well, he was dead, poor fellow, so one could not say any ill of him, but there was precious little good one could say. Of course it did not make any difference, but still it wanted thinking over.

And Sandy, too, he had got to master the flood of memories that poured into his mind, and bid fair to drown sense and reason, and to set very plainly before himself, that the sweet, graceful-looking girl

sitting next him, with downcast eyes and head a little bent, was not by any means the same as little Pen of ten years ago. Though she was hardly conscious he had looked at her at all and, when she stole a glance at him from time to time, his eyes were always fixed on the mailed arm grasping a sword on the hatchment opposite, he had taken in, not only every detail of her face and figure, but every particular of her dress ; and though utterly unversed in millinery and unconscious of what it was that gave the nameless charm to her costume, could have described, no doubt in very clumsy and masculine language, but with perfect accuracy, every fold and lace and ribbon that made up the whole effect. He had to realize that this was young Tom's lady-love and that this was the girl of whom old Tom had said, "She is exactly the sort of girl I should like him to marry."

CHAPTER XX.

AMONG THE LILIES.

I AM afraid that neither of the three occupants of the Highfield seat that Sunday afternoon paid much attention to the service, though in outward appearance they were devout, and I think they would have made a poor figure if they had been catechized on the sermon, though Mr. Barnes, the Vicar, flattered himself it was one of his best, and was glad, as he told his wife, that he had selected that for this afternoon, when there happened to be two strangers in the Percival seat who paid marked attention to it, and one of whom might — there was no knowing — have a presentation to a valuable living in his gift and be at a loss to find an able and deserving man to whom to offer it.

But little as was the attention Sandy paid to it, he was sorry when it came to an end, and the blessing had been given and the organ, under the hands of the village schoolmistress, poured forth a jubilant strain, with one of the higher notes ciphering gayly throughout, and the little chorister boys

shuffled out, followed by the Vicar. He had a sort of nervous shrinking from further conversation with Pen; it had been unmixed joy meeting her again; it was perfect satisfaction to sit by her side and feel her dress brush against him from time to time, and to hear her voice in the responses, and to be able to steal a look now and then at her, and to see how sweet and lovely she was and how like her mother, and how, fair and dainty as she was, there were still the outlines and hues of health about her, which had been so sadly wanting in her mother; to notice how prettily she was dressed, simply enough but, as was apparent, even to his ignorant eye, with a grace and elegance which can only be arrived at by good taste combined with money.

If only that last day at Purton Street could be blotted out from her memory and his, and they could go back to things as they were before then, when he was the old friend and she was little Pen, quite as much a child to him as Tre was, who could rest her head on his knee without embarrassment, and talk to him with as much confidence as she could to her mother, and far more than to her father. No doubt she had forgotten all about it or only remembered it as a curious, dreadful sort of dream in that feverish time of trouble and anxiety.

ety, or perhaps, indeed, she had understood it as little at the time as Louis Brand had done, who had never taken in the idea that Sandy proposed to marry little Pen, though he had apparently listened to every word spoken in the studio that morning. Was it the same with Pen? But even for the sake of the relief it would be to the embarrassment of their future intercourse, Sandy could not bring himself to wish this and to give up the belief, which he had hardly consciously acknowledged to lurk in his inmost mind, that there had been an answer to the passionate love in his heart, a meaning in the down-dropped eyes, a promise in the trembling, little hand.

But this was a thought he had discouraged from the first, and systematically snubbed and mocked at for the past ten years, so it must have had amazing vitality, to raise its soft, little head when he had done his best to smother it, and to whisper in its gentle voice against all the conclusive and crushing arguments brought to bear on it. But now, he told himself, he had done for it utterly. This new argument, young Tom himself, with his pleasant debonair manner and good-looking face, was quite sufficient to put any ridiculous notion out of his head. Why, he had only to look at Tom to assure himself that it was not likely, when there were such

young fellows as he to have, that a girl, almost a child, should give a thought to an ugly, clumsy, old fellow like him or even, if by any wild improbability she gave the thought, that it would not have died out long ago and be a dead and forgotten thing at the end of ten years.

So, as he followed Pen out of church, he resolved to ignore that episode and be as unconstrained as if it had never been.

"You must come and see my aunt," Pen said. "Oh ! of course you must come. Tre would never forgive me if I did not bring you back. You will hardly know Tre, she has grown such a big girl. We have so often fancied your coming, sometimes one way, sometimes another, but never just standing in the beech-wood path as we came to afternoon service. She will be so vexed that she did not come this afternoon, but she had a headache and Aunt Penelope would not let her because the sun was hot. When we were in London she used to watch for you by the hour together at the window. She said she was quite sure that some day you would pass, and once, do you know? she persuaded Aunt Penelope to take us down to Purton Street to try and find you and father ; but they did not even remember the name. Oh ! Sandy, why did you and father never write? We wanted

so much to tell you that we were well and happy and how good Aunt Penelope was to us."

They went slowly up the beechwood path with young Tom walking behind, a little impatiently flicking the small branches out of the way with his walking-stick. He was so unused to play second fiddle that I am afraid he did not do it very gracefully, but perhaps in this case it was a particularly difficult part to read off at sight.

From the beech-wood, a gate in some palings leads into Highfield Park, across which goes a path with lime-trees on either side, all in honey-sweet flower, and from this lime-tree walk a door in the old brick wall with heavy buttresses leads into the kitchen garden, into a buzzing of bees and a warm sunshiny smell of lavender and rosemary, and into a temptation to step aside from the direct path of duty, with its high box edging, to look at the scarlet strawberries on the sloping bed to the right, or to feel the golden apricots against the wall.

Little Tre when first she came to Highfield, being unused to such displays, except behind shop windows and under the jealous guardianship of tradesmen, used to think that "Lead us not into temptation" had special reference to that sunny wall, and she connected the next clause, "Deliver us from evil," with the nettles in the ditch beyond

the asparagus bed, into which once on a time she fell headlong, and required outward application of dock leaves for the rest of the afternoon, and internal treatment with bread and honey in the housekeeper's room.

Long before they reached the kitchen garden Sandy had become quite convinced that Pen had forgotten all about that strange little episode in Purton Street ; and if there was a pang of disappointment in his heart at this conviction, he was hardly conscious of it, so delightful was it to hear her voice and meet her eyes seeking his with the old unclouded confidence.

He told her what he could of her father, and of his strange determination not to see or hear of them again, from his persuasion that this separation was better for them. In Sandy's simple words, it sounded so great and noble a piece of heroism and self-sacrifice, that the girl's eyes filled up with tears.

"But he did not know how we fretted after him," she said, "and Aunt Penelope was as anxious as we were to find him. She has been so good to us, Sandy, so very good, and we were so ungrateful and disagreeable to her at first ; but Tre was ill such a long time and nearly died, and you can't imagine how kind she was then. I can't think,

looking back now, how it was we disliked her so and thought her so cold and proud and unlike mother. We wrote to all the places where we thought father might be and put several advertisements in the papers, but we never heard, and the only comfort was to think you were sure to see him sometimes, and be a friend to him."

And Sandy said it was so and that he had seen him pretty often, which was a mild way of putting the fact that for the last ten years he had hardly left him for more than a few days at a time; and he was glad that young Tom had dropped behind to pick a particularly tempting strawberry, so that he could not enlighten Pen's mind on the subject.

"Were you with him when he died?"

"Yes, fortunately I was at Monkton. It was there he died. Do you remember, Pen, that little house on the beach?"

She nodded. "Did he speak of us? send us any message?"

"Yes, the last words he said were, tell the children their mother wants them."

They were leaving the kitchen garden by a path with a high clipped yew-hedge on either side, along which stood a stately row of Madonna lilies, tall and pure; and to Sandy's mind Pen in her white dress was just such another. She was think-

ing of her father, and Sandy knew, as well as if he could have seen into her mind, that the kind magic of death and distance had conjured away all that was sad and painful and bitter in the memory, covering with a gentle hand his faults and failings, and throwing soft light on all his good points; and Sandy felt that his ten years' patience was more than repaid since it had given back a loving memory of her father to little Pen.

That path led them out on to the broad, sunshiny lawn, and there under a large tulip-tree was the tea-table spread and Miss Percival sitting in a low chair, with Tre on the grass at her feet, with a fox terrier, who was being taught some trick with the bribe of a piece of cake, which, as he fully understood that he would get it if the trick were performed or not, was not a sufficient goad to urge him to perfection.

“Tre!”

At the sound of her sister's voice, the girl knelt up and looked at the comers, shading her eyes from the sun, a beam of which fell through the foliage on her uncovered head. For a moment she knelt there, looking, looking at the tall, gaunt, loose-limbed man at Pen's side, and then she gave a cry and sprang to her feet, and the next moment she had run across the sunny turf and had

sprung right into Sandy's arms, with her hands clasped behind his neck, and kissed him, just as she used to do ten years before.

"Upon my word! I think we have had pretty near enough of this!" said young Tom to himself, as he came out of the yew-tree walk, with a very unusually ill-tempered expression.

CHAPTER XXI.

LITTLE MISS TRE.

“A NOTE for you, Sir, and the young lady says, please, may she speak to you for a minute?”

Followed almost immediately by the clatter of a pony's feet on the gravel path outside the breakfast-room window, and the apparition of a chestnut pony and a blue-habited rider, looking half shyly, half audaciously into the room, at which Sandy and old and young Tom sat at their not too early breakfast. A very sweet, smiling, little face it was, that evidently knew itself to be welcome everywhere, a face that had grown up in the sunshine, any one could see. Aunt Penelope's love and kindness were written in letters of gold plainly to be read on Tre's happy young face.

“Aunt Penelope wants you to come to lunch,” she said, “and I've brought the note. Pen and I have so much to say to you, we thought, perhaps, you would ride back with me. Percy is on the bay, which will carry you nicely.”

"Ride? My dear child, what do you take me for? I don't think I've ever been on a horse in my life since my earliest infancy, when I have a dim remembrance of a ride during which I was more often off than on."

"Oh! how provoking! Pen said I had much better drive the pony carriage, but I wanted you to see Dick, my new pony. Good-morning, Mr. Maclaren," this to young Tom, who had just appeared behind his uncle at the window. "Yes, this is Dick, and he *would* like a piece of sugar. What's to be done about Sandy? I'm afraid to lose sight of him, for fear he should n't come, and I could n't face Pen without him, and he says he can't ride. Mayflower is *so* quiet, he really is! and Percy is getting so fat, the walk would do him a lot of good."

A sound of prancing and kicking about on the gravel, round the corner of the house, did not give very convincing evidence of Mayflower's steadiness, or may perhaps have been due to Percy's resentment at the remark about his stoutness.

"I could run behind," suggested Sandy, "and hold on by Dick's tail. I suppose he does not go very fast."

"Does n't he? Why! Mayflower could hardly

keep up with him, and you should see him take a fence ! Would you like me just to trot him round the meadow for you to see his paces ? Aunt Penelope says she never saw a prettier pony, and she knows a lot about horses, you know."

Sandy did not know much about horses, but he was quite sure he had never seen a prettier pony or rider either ; and young Tom was of much the same opinion, and they spent a considerable time in the meadow admiring both.

" It is holiday time," Tre told them ; so she had not to hurry back to lessons and could even spare time to visit young Tom's retriever puppies, whose fat bodies and broad foolish noses and light brown eyes, squinting with youthfulness, and sudden manner of sitting down on all occasions went straight to her heart.

Old Tom had joined the party by this time, and, allusion having been made to Tre's partiality for small pigs, and to the little one that she had nursed at Up-Monkton farm, nothing would satisfy him but that he must display the treasures of his sty to little Miss Tre ; and he found her a most congenial companion in the farmyard, without the usual conventional, young lady-like disgust to the nasty, dirty creatures, but with an appreciation

of their good points that you hardly ever find in the female sex, and a respect for their mental qualities that is rare in either.

Old Tom fell quite a captive to Tre's fascinations, and he told Sandy that if the elder sister were the same style, he was not a bit surprised at young Tom having taken a fancy to her, nor could Sandy be surprised either.

There is no doubt that Tre much enjoyed herself in this bachelor establishment, walking about, with one hand slipped under Sandy's arm, while with the other she held up her pretty riding-skirt; and with old Tom on the other side, holding forth about pigs, and asking her advice as if she were an experienced farmer and had a reason, beyond the æsthetical, for preferring black pigs to white, and short noses to long, and curly tails to straight; and with young Tom bringing up the rear and joining in the conversation whenever she deigned to throw him a word or two over her shoulder.

I am afraid there was a zest given to Tre's enjoyment by the consciousness that Aunt Penelope might not quite approve of this visit at all, still less of its being so prolonged, and that even Pen might look a little grave and say that Tre must remember she was nearly grown up, and that

grown-up young ladies do not pay calls on gentlemen all by themselves. But, of course, Sandy being there made all the difference, and old Mr. Maclaren (you see, our adjective for him appeared quite appropriate to the eyes of sixteen) was so nice and good-tempered, and she had no idea, not the least ! that young Mr. Maclaren had gone off to pick strawberries for her till they got back to the veranda, and found it spread out so tempting and cool, with such great scarlet monsters, (much bigger than ours, Pen,) with cream and sponge cake and a great block of ice and lemonade, and it would have seemed so ungrateful to come away, when they had taken so much trouble, and besides she had had breakfast early and quite a long ride, and it was hot and she was really a little tired. Such a lot of excuses were poured out to a rather reproachful Pen by the delinquent, as she changed her dress hurriedly, having appeared only just in time to do so before lunch.

“And, Pen, do you think Aunt Penelope will mind, but I asked old Mr. Maclaren to come and see our pigs this afternoon and — and young Mr. Maclaren too?”

“Oh ! Tre.”

“Yes, of course I ought not, but it’s such a long way for Sandy to walk, and I did n’t know if we

could drive him back, and they said they should be driving this way and would come and fetch him. What's the matter, Pen? Do you think Aunt Penelope will be vexed?"

"Oh no! I dare say she won't mind; but you talk as if Sandy were quite a feeble, old man."

"Well! he's not so very young, and Mr. Tom Maclaren said he was awfully tired when he got back last night. He's rheumatic too, and Mr. Tom would not let him sit down on the grass when we were out in the meadow. He says he has his hands full, looking after the two old gentlemen and taking care of them; it is such fun to hear him talk."

But Pen did not seem to appreciate the joke and she thought Mr. Tom Maclaren was inclined to be rather silly sometimes, and the luncheon bell would ring in a minute, and Tre knew that Aunt Penelope was vexed if she was late. And yet Pen lingered till Tre was ready, so that they could go together into the large drawing-room, where Sandy sat, talking to Aunt Penelope.

He had not lost the feeling of amazement and unreality that had overwhelmed him when he first met Pen; and it seemed almost impossible that he should be sitting now in the Highfield drawing-room, with Miss Percival entertaining him, and, as

far as in her lay, unbending and being gracious to him — that same Miss Percival who had ignored him with such utter disdain in Purton Street, and had swept past him as if he were of less importance than 'Liza with her smutty apron, or the umbrella-stand in the passage.

And in many points she was the very same Miss Percival — handsome, stately, dignified, not much older-looking than then, proud still, and cold, and a trifle hard to all the world but Pen and Tre. It was not to be expected that because she took those two into her heart, and lavished all the stores of her love on them, she should take all the rest of the world besides ; on the contrary, it was only perhaps natural that she should be more reserved and stiff to every one else. Even to the two girls her affection was not of a demonstrative nature, they had to take a good deal of it on trust, which is perhaps the best plan in every-day life and produces a more robust and long-lived attachment than that of a more emotional and caressing character. I do not think the servants found her by any means a more easy-going mistress, or with any less sharp an eye for dust or cobwebs, or more unconscious of unpunctuality or neglect ; neither did the friendly girls find her more lenient in the matter of feathers in hats or fringes on foreheads, or the village peo-

ple more easily to be moved to pity and broth, or sympathy and flannel petticoats, by their long-winded tales of distress.

To Sandy however she was unwontedly gracious, and there was no denying that, when Miss Percival chose to be gracious, she could be exceedingly charming; and Sandy, who even yet had not lost his shyness and awkwardness, found himself placed entirely at his ease, and not painfully conscious of being a fish out of water, and boring his companion and himself past all bearing.

As the two girls followed Sandy and Miss Percival into the dining-room to lunch, they exchanged glances of delighted surprise. When you like any one very much indeed and want every one else to share your sentiments, how you torment yourself over the impression he or she is likely to produce; the more you like him, the less justice you do him, and the less confidence you have in his not misconducting himself in some gross and outrageous way. Of course, directly the introduction is over, you are ready to declare that you always knew he would be liked and that no one could help admiring him, and you forget all the misgivings you felt.

So Pen had been torturing herself all the morning, till she had arrived at such a pitch of nervous-

ness, that she almost hoped that Sandy would not come, knowing how critical Aunt Penelope was apt to be, and not having any experience of Sandy under a society aspect. He was so big and conspicuous, you could not trust to anything he did being overlooked or insignificant, as is the comfort about our shorter brethren ; and poor Pen literally shivered at the bare idea of Aunt Penelope's *pince-nez* surveying him in the cold-blooded way in which she had sometimes seen those instruments of torture brought to bear on some pretentious or impertinent upstart.

But, before she had been five minutes at lunch, she would have declared with the greatest assurance that she had never had the smallest doubt that Aunt Penelope would like Sandy, and that he would always be at his ease in any society, being such a thorough gentleman — which was quite a mistaken argument on her part both as regards gentlemen in general and Sandy in particular, as he and many others are apt to feel ill at ease in society, in spite of birth and breeding.

They were discussing over lunch how curious it was that they should not have met sooner, not so much Sandy and the two girls, seeing that his visits to Luckham had been so few and far between, but that it was only within the last few

months that Miss Percival had met his brother and nephew, and then neither she nor the girls had connected their name with their father's old friend, nor had Tom noticed the coincidence of Miss Percival's nieces having the same name as the Louis Brand to whom his uncle was attached.

It is curious to observe in country society how entirely it falls into circles, having for a centre some town or church or railway-station or big gentleman's seat. The circles touch and sometimes interlace, but still keep their own centre; and very often people remain strangers to those who live within a few miles of them, because they happen to belong to different circles. This was the case with Luckham Dene and Highfield House. Luckham has Merfield for its centre, and goes up to town by the G. W. R., and employs the Merfield doctor and tradesmen, and is in the Merfield rural deanery, and belongs to the Merfield choral union, and points its chants in the manner pleasing to the musical curate at Merfield, and sends its paupers to the Merfield workhouse, and its candidates to be confirmed there; whereas Highfield is, you know, in the Ashling deanery, and goes up by South Western, and is under the musical jurisdiction of the Ashling organist, who has taken a musical degree of some mysterious nature, which

gives him a right to despise ignorant humanity for miles round ; they are brought into the world and despatched therefrom under the superintendence of Dr. Perry of Ashling, and belong to the Ashling Primrose League Habitation, of which, I need hardly say, Miss Percival is a dame, whereas, I am afraid, Merfield has its Liberal tendencies, and belongs to that unpolitical or unpoetical class described by Wordsworth —

“ A primrose by the river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.”

It was partly due to their being thus in different circles that the Maclarens and Miss Percival had only lately become acquainted, and partly that, during the first few years of the two Toms’ living at Luckham Dene, Colonel Percival had been still living, but too much of an invalid to allow of any society being kept up, and after his death there was no gentleman in the house to call on other gentlemen, which made a difficulty in establishing visiting terms, with a house like Luckham Dene, where there were no ladies.

Pen did not talk much at lunch, and Tre’s chatter was kept under restraint by Aunt Penelope’s presence ; but, after lunch, when Miss Percival went away to write some notes, bidding the girls

show Mr. Maclaren the garden and greenhouses, there was plenty of talk, and "Oh! Sandy, don't you remember?" and "Oh! Sandy, shall you ever forget?"

Tre had her arm through his directly, and could emphasize her memories by a squeeze of his arm or by pressing her cheek against his shoulder; and Pen on the other side might have done the same, if only she could have overcome that stupid feeling of shyness that made her thrill all over if her hand touched his even by accident.

Neither could she talk on like Tre without embarrassment, though there was so much more she could remember than her sister, but perhaps that was the secret of it, there was one memory that made her tongue falter and the color rise in her cheeks and her heart beat, and that one memory would keep intruding itself among the others, about which she might have talked so pleasantly.

If Tre fell behind for a moment to pick a flower, or ran on to speak to one of the gardeners, and Pen was left alone with Sandy, a terror came over her that he would say something about that last day at Purton Street, and she talked fast and rather incoherently to prevent that terrible silence which she felt sure would preface the sub-

ject; and yet, as the afternoon passed on, she began to wonder if Sandy could have forgotten all about it.

"There are some people coming for tennis this afternoon," Tre told him. "I hope your nephew will come soon enough to play. You don't play, do you, Sandy? No, of course not, but you shall have the most comfortable chair under the tulip-tree and be umpire. I shall choose the chair for you—that deep one with the red cushion, Pen, don't you know?"

But Pen was not sympathetic about that deep chair—indeed Tre thought she was not at all kind and considerate to Sandy. She said he ought to play tennis, and that it was very lazy not to, when, as Tre reasoned with herself, of course old people don't care to be running about. And then, when James had brought out that chair and Tre had shaken up the cushion and set it in the best position for shade and seeing the game, Pen herself sat down in it, though she always said she did not like that chair, it was so deep that her toes did not reach the ground when she leant back, and she let Sandy sit on a horrid, little, upright chair, that went by the name of the stool of repentance, because it made one's back ache if one sat long in it, and not only that, but she let James go quite out

of hearing before she remembered that she wanted her knitting from the drawing-room table, and actually let poor Sandy go across in the broiling sun to fetch it for her, and she really did not want it at all, for she was not the least fond of work, and did not do a stitch all the afternoon, and let the ball of wool roll away into the verbena-bed, just as if she did it on purpose to make Sandy pick it up for her, and he so stiff and rheumatic as young Mr. Maclaren had said !

Pen was really very inconsiderate and odd to-day, and Sandy must be very good-natured, for he seemed to like it. She was so cross too, for when, in the evening, Sandy had just driven off with his brother and young Mr. Maclaren in the dog-cart, and she and Tre were standing, watching them down the drive, and Tre said — “ Oh ! Pen, it has been so delightful to see how well Sandy gets on with Aunt Penelope ! They have been talking nearly all the afternoon, and I ’m sure she likes him very much, and oh ! Pen, I could n’t help thinking how nice it would be if she were to marry him. He ’s just the right age for her. Would n’t it be nice ? ” Pen turned on her quite angrily, and said it was very silly to think of such things, and that Aunt Penelope would be very angry, and that it was only vulgar people who imagined that a lady

and gentleman could not get on well without there being a lot of nonsense.

Tre could not remember when she had seen Pen so much put out, and she had never called her vulgar before, never !

CHAPTER XXII.

DRIFTING.

TRE'S vulgar opinion about Sandy and Miss Percival was not confined to herself. Old Tom imparted the same, with much chuckling, to his son, as they dressed for dinner that evening.

“By Jove ! Tom, that uncle of yours is a deep fellow ! An uncommonly fine woman, Miss Percival, and a tidy little estate, Highfield, and in first-rate order ! and a man might do worse than step into a house like that, and hang up his hat as its master. She may be a bit of a Tartar, perhaps, but Sandy's an easy-going temper and won't interfere, and he wants some one with a will of her own to make up his mind for him. I never gave him credit for being so wide awake. It really was as good as a play to see him make the running this afternoon. You did n't see half the fun because you were playing tennis, but I nearly split more than once, listening to the pace they were going. And all this business over the bailiff's accounts that Sandy is to help her with ! As if he knew as much

about farming as Rob there ! I dare say he can do accounts right enough, but farming ! Now if she 'd asked me — ”

“ Oh ! that 's it ? ” said young Tom, with his chin up in the air, buttoning his collar, “ he 's put your nose out of joint with the lovely Miss Percival — eh, Sir ? I did n't know you had a soft corner in your heart for Highfield House. Well ! there 's no denying he 's cut you clean out. It seems to me that I 've got a word to say to it too. I don't know how the old colonel left his money, but I fancy it all went to Miss Percival, and the nieces will come off second best if the aunt takes to herself a husband.”

“ So the money was the attraction, was it ? ” said old Tom. “ I was romantic enough to think it was the pretty, little face. But it 's a mercenary age ! ”

“ It *is* a pretty, little face, is n't it, Sir ? I don't know when I saw a prettier, and she has a way of looking straight at you, so serious and innocent, not goggling her eyes up and down to show off her lashes — though, by Jove ! ain't they long ? — and she does n't giggle like other girls, but when she laughs, she laughs out as if she meant it, and not just to show the dimples in her cheeks.”

During the ensuing weeks Sandy was very much at Highfield House, and Tom the elder was more and more strengthened in his belief in his own sharp-sightedness and in his brother's acuteness; but young Tom, who managed also to be a good deal at Highfield, though his opinion was not asked about farming matters nor his services retained for checking the bailiff's accounts, was not so entirely convinced on either point, and was even fain to confess to himself — young people are not as a rule willing to confess such weakness to others — that he was fairly puzzled.

I think between you and me, reader, that young people do sometimes see farther into a stone-wall than their elders, though it does not do to let them think so, and this particular stone-wall was getting to have more and more interest to young Tom, as that sunny July rolled away into pleasant, mellow August.

There was hardly a day on which the Highfield party and the Luckham Dene party did not meet on one excuse or other. Besides that business excuse which took Sandy over to Highfield frequently in the morning, and which old Tom openly scoffed at as the most paltry excuse imaginable, there were meetings for tennis and luncheon and boating and picnics and riding, there were messages to be taken

and notes delivered or something that had been left behind to restore to its owner.

If any power on earth could make the course of Tom's true love run smooth, his father would do it — not that old Tom was always quite judicious in his interference with that capricious stream, which runs smoothest as a rule when it is left alone, to run under the bridge at its own sweet will. He sometimes put his spoke in rather awkwardly, when parties had to be divided, so as to throw Tom and Pen together in the same boat, or on the return walk in the moonlight, or on the same side at tennis, and was surprised at irritated glances rewarding his kind endeavors. He also had a way of talking of "we old fellows" and "you young folk," which was particularly annoying to Pen, and not always quite acceptable to Sandy.

Sandy went drifting along just then without looking ahead. It was very pleasant, life had never seemed so bright, it was quite enough to live just in the present, seeing Pen and Tre nearly every day, being coaxed and teased and petted by Tre, and being near Pen. Why cannot these pleasant times go on indefinitely? Happiness is such a fragile thing, it does not bear fingering; if you try to alter it at all it often disappears. But restless mortals cannot learn to leave well alone, they al-

ways want to be a little bit happier, and their tinkering often ends in an entire collapse.

It was old Tom on this occasion who could not leave well alone, and who, being afraid to attack young Tom from that wholesome paternal respect which parents of the present day are apt to display, went at Sandy instead. He and young Tom had an engagement for September to join a big shooting-party in Warwickshire, and he was in a fidget that matters should be settled, between young Tom and Pen, before they went, and he could not see why they should not be and what was the reason of the delay.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," as he told Sandy, "that the girl likes him and he likes her, so what's the good of all this shilly-shallying? I declare if it goes on much longer, I shall take the matter into my hands and say, 'My dear, Tom loves you and wants you to marry him, only he has n't the pluck to tell you so.' I wish you'd have a talk to him, Sandy, and put it before him. When I said something the other day, he pretended to be cool about it and to fancy the girl has a liking for some one else, which is nonsense, pure nonsense! for who is there, I should like to know, except half-a-dozen starveling curates that no sensible girl would look twice at? Why, there is not a soul worth

looking at but Tom between this and Merfield. Now is there?" said this proud father, fully believing what he said.

"You 'd better speak to him yourself," Sandy answered.

"I tell you he won't let me tackle him. Now you 've known the girl all her life. I suppose there could not have been any attachment before she came to live with her aunt? but of course not, she was only a child when she came — twelve, was n't it?"

"Quite a child," Sandy testified, "fifteen or about that."

"Well, I wish you would tell Tom that, and that you are quite sure she does not care for any one else. You like her, don't you, Sandy? You really, honestly, think highly of her, and think her good enough for Tom? Of course it's nothing or very little to you, but it's a serious thing to me, and I feel sometimes that it is a great responsibility helping it on at all; that if it turned out unfortunate, or if she was not all one fancied, I should never forgive myself. If you 've any doubt on the matter, just give me a hint, and I 'll manage to get Tom away to Warwickshire sooner. I think he is pretty hard hit, but still I 've fancied the same before and it's proved to be nothing at all; so if

you know any cause or impediment why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, as the parsons say, out with it, and I'll see if there's not some Warwickshire young lady who can put little Miss Pen out of his head."

No, Sandy knew no cause or impediment, and when further urged, declared that he thought Tom would be lucky to get such a wife, which old Tom thought was putting it rather strongly, much as he liked Pen.

"But then, of course, she's just like a child of your own, isn't she, Sandy? quite like your daughter, eh?"

"Quite," agreed poor Sandy.

"Then you'll have a talk with Tom, and tell him to pluck up his courage and have it out? I can't think what he's afraid of. She has given him as much encouragement as you could expect from a modest girl, and as for Miss Percival, it's plain she has no objection. Why, she's always asking him over. Oh yes, I know it's not all on Miss Pen's account, she's so sociable, it's one word for her niece and two for herself, eh, Sandy?"

And then old Tom was wanted about something in the farmyard, and he left Sandy to his reflections. Not very pleasant reflections either; that drifting process is by no means a safe one, however pleas-

ant it may be, and somehow, through those July and August days, Sandy had drifted some way from the sensible resolution he had arrived at in the High-field seat that Sunday afternoon when he first met Pen, to regard her as young Tom's lady-love and the very girl of all others suited to be his wife. It was very odd, considering how much he had been with the two, that it had been so little impressed on his mind, when it was so very evident to old Tom and no doubt to every one else ; it seemed to him that Tom was as much with Tre as with Pen, and that it was only when old Tom put in his oar that there was any of that pairing off, that he was always led to suppose came about naturally without any assistance from outsiders. However, no doubt he was dull and short-sighted, and he had had, to be sure, no experience in such matters.

It was not till quite the last thing at night that Sandy could make up his mind to say anything to young Tom, and then it was partly because old Tom went up to bed and left them together, with a meaning look at Sandy as much as to say, " Now 's your time ! "

It was a lovely night, with the big harvest moon shining clear and calm in the cloudless sky, throwing black shadows across the lawn, and drawing a

silver streak on the stream below, and showing quite distinctly the sheaves of corn in the harvest fields on the opposite hill.

Young Tom was sitting on the arm of a chair, in the veranda, smoking and contemplating this moonlight scene, with his face turned away, so that Sandy could not gain anything from observing his expression, while Sandy himself sat by the table full in the lamplight, with the artlessness of age, so that Tom could, every now and then, cast a look over his shoulder at his uncle's face, and get a good deal of information in that way.

Sandy plunged into the subject *apropos* to nothing at all — indeed I think the last matter of discussion had been rats, than which nothing could have been more unsuggestive of Pen.

"I have been talking to your father about Pen."

"Ah?" knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"She is a very nice girl."

"Very."

"And pretty."

"Quite."

"And you like her."

"I do."

"And she likes you."

"I hope so."

"Look here, Tom, nonsense apart, what do you

mean to do? You're not just amusing yourself, and trifling with her? If you are — "

"Oh come! Sandy, don't look so fierce! My nerves won't stand it."

It was very unsatisfactory, and Sandy began to wish he had left it alone; but presently Tom himself renewed the subject in a more serious tone. "I'm rather glad to have a talk with you about this matter. The governor is such an impetuous, old person, he wants everything settled up, and the day fixed and the ring bought, in a couple of days."

"Ah," thought Sandy to himself, "one day is enough for some people."

"There's no doubt, as you say, that she's a very nice, pretty girl, but — "

Sandy drew fiercely at his pipe. He was very fond of Tom in a usual way, but somehow, at this moment, the expression "puppy" associated itself in his mind with his nephew, and there was an irritable feeling in his toe, as if it would have kicked somebody or something if it had followed its own inclination. That "but" seemed a perfect outrage on Pen — Pen, as he saw her before his mind's eye, standing in her white dress among the lilies, pure and stately and gracious. Pen to be spoken of with a "but"! Sentiments read more

plainly than their owner knew in the light of the lamp.

"I can't help thinking," went on Tom imperturbably, "that she may have had some other attachment, liked some other fellow. I suppose you don't know of anything of the sort before she came to Highfield?"

"She was a mere child when she came." Sandy's voice was not very distinct, his pipe did not seem to draw.

"Yes, to be sure! so she was. Let me see, how old was she?"

"Fifteen," rather shortly.

"Oh, as much as that? Well, many girls are accomplished coquettes at that age."

"She was not."

"No, I should think not, she must have been very like what her sister is now, only not so pretty."

"Not so pretty? Tre will never be fit to hold a candle to Pen!"

"Oh, come now! tastes differ. But I'm not denying that Miss Pen is pretty, only a trifle too serious perhaps, a little old for her age. She makes one feel almost like a boy when one talks to her, as if she belonged to a generation above one. Of course it's absurd, she's only—how old now? Two or three and twenty—? But I

think the fact of the matter is, we all of us as a family have rather a young taste. The governor, if you notice, always gets on best with little girls, and don't take to the dowagers at all, though, to be sure, the mother was a year or two his senior. Then you don't think there was any sort of love affair before she came?"

"I think not. If there was, it must have been too childish an affair to have lasted any time."

"And I suppose in those days in Dalston — Dalston, was n't it? — they did n't see many people? hardly any one but you, I think you told me."

"No."

"Then you think there is no doubt in that quarter and that I might go ahead? The governor seems very hot on it, and I think I have Miss Percival on my side. Well, if the deed's to be done, it's no use putting it off, though it makes a fellow a bit nervous.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who fears to put it to the touch
To win or lose it all,"

sang Tom lightly. "To-morrow, shall it be? What do you say?"

“Why not to-morrow?”

“Why! are you going to bed already?” for Sandy had got up and laid down his half-finished pipe, every detail marked by a watchful eye from the veranda — an eye with a laugh lurking in the corner of it. “I thought you would sit up a bit longer and give me some advice for to-morrow. A criminal used to be allowed a friend to bear him company the night before he was turned off, and if I am to make the fatal plunge to-morrow — ”

There is a limit to human endurance; the last turn of the rack will wring a groan from the most intrepid of martyrs, and Sandy could stand no more.

“I think I’ll turn in,” he said wearily, “I’m tired.”

“You wish me success, don’t you? She is a dear little girl, and I’m really very fond of her. There’s no one in the world I’d rather have for my — ”

And here the door closed on Sandy, sick at heart, tired to death, so that he did not hear the concluding word of Tom’s sentence, which, indeed, was not meant for his ears.

“There’s no one in the world I’d rather have for my — aunt.”

And then that worthless, good-for-nothing nephew of his burst into peals of carefully smothered laughter till the tears ran down his cheeks, and he had to bend and rock backwards and forwards to get the better of it.

“Poor, old buffer!” he said, when he got breath again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A THREATENING OF GOUT.

“**Y**OUR uncle is seedy this morning,” said old Tom at breakfast next day, “he’s got a bit of a cold hanging about him, and, I tell you what, Tom, I should n’t be a bit surprised if he had n’t a touch of the gout. I felt a bit like it myself yesterday, and it’s not likely he’ll escape. Why, I had it before I was five-and-twenty, and I’ve not had a clear twelvemonth since. Oh! it’s no use talking about port wine. That’s quite an exploded notion; you can have gout quite as well on toast and water nowadays, and it’s not the least aristocratic, for paupers in the workhouse infirmary have their share of it every bit as much as the ratepayers.”

“He’ll have to be quick about it,” said the unsympathizing Tom, “for he promised Miss Percival to be over there this morning by eleven. I said I would drive him over, as,” with a would-be conscious look and a careful avoidance of his father’s beaming gaze, “I have a little business to settle myself over there.”

"He said that, perhaps, you would take his excuses to Miss Percival or he 'd write a note."

"Ah!" said Tom coolly, "we can send the boy over; my business can wait."

"Why should n't you go?" urgently. "Sandy seemed very anxious not to prevent your going, and Miss Percival will think it queer if neither of you turn up."

"Oh, hang it all! am I to do Sandy's courting for him? That's more than I bargained for. Am I to ask Miss Percival her intentions? or get her to name the day?"

Tom was in one of his tiresome moods, in which his father, not being good at repartee, and also being very much in earnest, always got the worst of it.

"It's very plain," he said, "that Sandy is not up to much. He says he's had a bad night, and I heard him once, when I woke, tramping up and down his room. Perhaps it was that cucumber at dinner; people with a gouty tendency ought to be careful what they eat."

"Very," said Tom; "but it does not matter what they drink, port wine, or toast and water, it's all the same. He didn't sleep? didn't he? that's odd! but, of course, as you say, it may have been the cucumber."

Sandy certainly looked none the better for his sleepless night, whether that sleeplessness was caused by cucumber or anything else; he had relapsed into the listlessness that had so struck Tom when he first came back, which had quite disappeared during the last few weeks. He came slouching down with his shoulders up to his ears, and his oldest coat on, and was chilly and irritable, which certainly looked like gout. He kept complaining of the cold, though it was a bright, fresh August day; and, at his suggestion, a fire was lighted in the smoking-room, and he pulled up an armchair with its back to the window and collected a heap of newspapers, to be a pretext for silence if any one came into the room.

The sound of Tom's voice was particularly irritating to his nerves, and the cheerful whistle he kept up exasperated him almost beyond endurance. Old Tom was much more supportable, though his suggestions about the gout were annoying, but Sandy felt old and dilapidated, so the remarks about "we old fellows" and "at our age, you know, Sandy," which had irritated him occasionally, now chimed in with his own sentiments.

Young Tom, though sorely tempted, mercifully forbore to torment him, and consented to go off

alone to Highfield, bearing a note of apology from Sandy.

“Though I shall get nothing but black looks when they see me arrive without you. They will be horribly disgusted, — I mean, of course, Miss Percival.”

When he was gone, and old Tom was off on some farm business, Sandy was left to himself. Such a wearisome old self to be left to ! and to feel that to the end of his life no better company was to be looked for !

He could not prevent his mind following Tom and his high-stepping chestnut along the pleasant road, under the hedgerow elms, heavy with their thick, dark, summer foliage, untouched yet by autumn's hand, past the broad, sunny, harvest fields, where the big wagons were gathering the golden sheaves, past the pretty lodge, covered with honeysuckle and monthly roses, where the lodge-keeper's wife would run out to open the gate and smile and courtesy to the young fellow with, no doubt, a shrewd guess at his errand ; then the drive through the park up to the fine, old house — Where would he find her ? In the drawing-room ? out in the garden ? under the tulip-tree ? down in the shrubbery ? Not, Sandy hoped, with a touch of sharp pain, in the yew-tree walk where the

lilies grew! He could not bear to think that Tom's tale of love should be told there; that was his, and though the lilies were long since gone, in Sandy's mind they bloomed there still, white and fragrant and pure, and Pen among them.

He took up a newspaper, and tried to turn his thoughts by reading an article on ensilage, but his attention would wander, and the print was bad, and he could not see; no doubt his sight was failing, what could he expect at his age? Then he poked the fire and let the poker drop on his foot, which recalled the idea of gout to his mind, and, by persistent thinking, he began to persuade himself that his foot was swelling and that he felt shooting pains up his leg, and he had even gone so far as to give vent to a groan, and to hoist his foot up on to a chair, when an interruption occurred which put it out of his head and apparently out of his foot too for good and all.

It was the sound of wheels coming up the drive, unmistakably those of Tom's dog-cart. What did this betide? An accepted lover does not generally fly from his lady's presence immediately; a rejected? Oh, no! that was impossible. Perhaps Pen was engaged with other visitors, and Tom saw he would have no chance to-day.

But the next moment Tom opened the door and

looked in, with such a smiling face as put any idea of rejection out of the question and made even suspense seem improbable.

“I’ve brought you some visitors,” he said; “as the mountain would not go to Mahomet, Mahomet has come to the mountain. Allow me to introduce Mahomet.”

And there were Pen and Tre, and before he could get the so-called gouty foot down, or struggle up from the depth of his armchair, they were bending over him with faces of much concern and compassion, and asking anxiously about his health.

“I made out such a pitiful case,” said Tom, “that the young ladies could not rest till they had seen the invalid, and I persuaded Miss Percival to let them come and have lunch and share the burden of nursing you. They have been attending the ambulance class at Ashling, and know how to treat all manner of ailments. Miss Tre has been longing for me to come to grief in the dog-cart, so that she might get a chance of bandaging a broken arm or two. They have brought their bandages and First Aidbook, and if you’re ready, Sir, they will set to work and administer an emetic or open an artery.”

Tom went rattling on with his nonsense, and

presently old Tom appeared and luncheon was ready, and the whole party adjourned to the dining-room. Pen was very quiet; Sandy fancied she was a little nervous; perhaps she knew what was coming. Tom was in very good spirits, laughing and talking all lunch-time. Sandy rather resented his behavior; it would have been more becoming in him, he thought, if he had shown more diffidence and had not made so sure of success. It was not good taste either, it seemed to him, to have brought Pen there; the proposal should have been made at Highfield, at the girl's own home, so that, if the answer were unfavorable, there might be no awkwardness for her.

In a moment of depression in the morning, Sandy had ordered a basin of arrowroot for his luncheon, which made its appearance accordingly, much to his embarrassment and to the amusement of young Tom, who, you may be sure, did not allow the incident to pass unnoticed.

He was not permitted to drop the part of invalid altogether; old Tom and Tre *bonâ fide*, and young Tom from *malice prepense*, kept up the delusion, young Tom offering his arm to help him from the luncheon-table, and Tre running for a footstool to put under his feet, and old Tom offering advice about things to be done and avoided

when an attack of gout was threatening ; so, of course, after lunch, when the party betook themselves into the garden and down the meadow to see some waterfowl on the stream, Sandy was not expected to join them, and Pen declared she was a little tired and would stop with him.

But it was not likely that old Tom would allow this division of the party, and before the meadow was reached, young Tom was sent back to beg Miss Pen to come, as his father particularly wanted her to see the ducks.

There was a little, comical look on Tom's face as he gave the message, the *tête-à-tête* in the veranda looked very pleasant, Sandy had brightened up amazingly, and Pen, in her low basket-chair at his side, looked quite content with the arrangement.

Pen got up a little reluctantly, and Sandy rose too, as if he would have accompanied her, and then stopped suddenly and sat down again. Was it a twinge of the gout, or was it a sudden recollection?

"Go, my dear," he said, "I think you had better. Go with Tom."

And then Tom and Pen went out of the veranda across the lawn, slowly as lovers go, and stopped, as lovers are wont to stop, at the gate

into the meadow. Old Tom could see them as he and Tre inspected the ducks, and fed them with bread-crumbs, and, with much inward delight and satisfaction, he tried to prolong as much as possible Tre's interest in the ducking and diving crowd, and to spin out the supply of bread, so that nothing should suggest a return to the house or the finding of any other sort of amusement.

Sandy too could see them, all too plainly for his peace of mind, as he sat in his chair under the veranda — Tom, leaning over Pen in eager speech; Pen, with bent head and down-dropped eyes, playing with a rose in her hand. Sandy could not endure the sight for more than a minute, but impatiently jerked his chair round so that his view was altered to that of the dining-room and the servants clearing the luncheon-table. He felt so old and cross and ill-natured, he could not stand this billing and cooing, there was something nauseating about it to a man of his age; he would go clear away. Tom was no son of his, thank goodness! he was not bound to stand by and admire whatever this young divinity chose to do, and applaud as his father did. He would go off the very next day, to some place where he could be as old and disagreeable as he pleased, — to Monkton, perhaps, to the two quiet graves, to the old, gray,

tossing sea, out of the way of congratulations and wedding-bells.

And then he became aware of a step coming towards him, a light step crossing the gravel path and hesitating at the veranda. It was Pen, and Pen by herself, with a strange, shy, wistful look on her face and the color coming and going in her cheeks, and she was disengaging something from a ribbon at her throat.

One effort more ! he must wish her joy, he must not spoil little Pen's happiness by his wretched selfishness.

"Sandy," she said, "I have been talking to Tom."

It was the first time she had spoken of him by his Christian name, and Sandy's jealous ear marked it with a pang.

"Yes," he answered, and his voice sounded very harsh and cold and unfit for an old friend, who had known her from her babyhood, and should have been happy in her happiness and rejoiced in her joy. "Yes, I know, my dear, I know. Where is he?"

"He has gone down into the meadow with Tre. Do you know, Sandy," she went on, — and as she spoke, standing in front of him, twisting a bit of narrow ribbon in her hands, Sandy saw that on the

third finger of her little left hand was a wedding-ring, old and thin and worn, but bright, — “do you know he told me to-day, what I have guessed for some time, that he loves little Tre ; only think of that ! little Tre, who seems only a child still. And do you know, Sandy, — but I did not tell Tom so, for he will find it out for himself one day, — I think little Tre loves him, though, perhaps, she hardly knows it herself. He won’t ask her yet, there is no need, they are very happy as they are, and she is not a poor, desolate, little girl who wants a home ; but if he speaks to-day, or waits for ten years, I think it will be all the same, that Tre will love him and no one else to the end of her life.”

She was silent a moment, and so was Sandy, who had got up and stood before her, with his eyes riveted on that little ring, which she kept turning on her finger as she spoke.

“Sandy,” she said with a little gasp, “do you remember what day it is? Do you remember what you said to me this very day ten years ago?”

He had her hand in his now, the hand with the wedding-ring.

“You asked me if I could trust you then, and I have trusted you all these ten years of silence, and

I trust you now, and I always shall as long as I live. You said, Sandy, I should be a child as long as I liked till some day. Oh, Sandy, has not that some day come?"

It was half an hour later, when they were walking down the shrubbery path to find the others, whom Tom had been carefully keeping out of the way by all the arts known to him. Both Pen's hands were clasped on Sandy's arm, and were kept there by his large, right hand.

That little ring of Sandy's mother was still on her finger; as on a former occasion, it did not come off as readily as it went on, but then, as Pen explained it, it might be a gouty tendency in the slim, little, white finger, "because, you know, Sandy, at our age, we must expect such things."

And there was Tom coming to meet them, to announce that tea was to be served in the boat-house by the stream; Tom with a world of mischief lurking in his eyes, with stores, as Sandy knew full well, of unsparing chaff to pour out on him by and by; but who cares for Tom's chaff? not Sandy for one.

"Well?" he said to Pen, "shall you expect me to call you Aunt Pen?"

"Of course I shall," she answered, and, as Sandy grudgingly let go one of her hands that she might

place it in Tom's, she added, "I think I shall like my nephew Tom."

And he answered, "And I like you very much for my Aunt Pen at present, but some day I should like you better for a sister."

So Tom had his "some day" too.

THE END.

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